



LIFE04NAT/LV/000198

SECOND PROGRESS REPORT

Covering the project activities from 30/06/2006 to 30/09/2007

Report date: 9/11/2007

**Restoration of Latvian Floodplains for EU priority species
and habitats**

Data Project

Project location	16 Natura 2000 sites in Latvia
Project start date:	01/10/2004
Project end date:	30/06/2008
Total Project duration (in months)	45 months
Total budget	€ 1 600 366
EC contribution:	€ 1 144 184
(%) of total costs	71.5
(%) of eligible costs	71.5

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LIST OF KEYWORDS AND ABBREVIATIONS

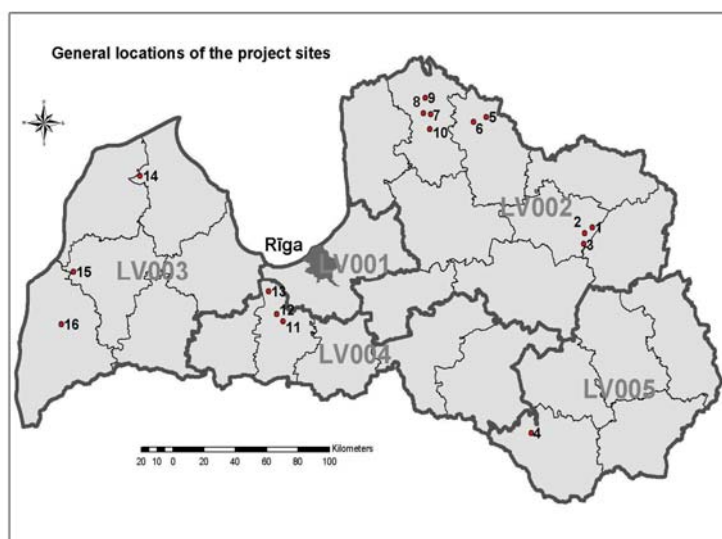
EC – European Commission
EMT – External Monitoring Team
LOS – Latvian Ornithological society
MOE – Ministry of Environment
MOA – Ministry of Agriculture
RDP – Rural Development Programme

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Floodplains are recognized as very important element of biological diversity, their existence crucial for numerous endangered and priority species, such as Corncrake *Crex crex**, Great Snipe *Gallinago media*, Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina**. All these species require open floodplain areas that are not overgrown with shrubs or trees and are therefore endangered by current processes of land abandonment and overgrowing in Latvia.

LIFE-Nature project “Restoration of Latvian Floodplains for EU priority species and habitats” started in October 2004 and will last until June 2008. It is dealing with 15 protected areas and Natura 2000 sites in Latvia that represent typical floodplain meadow areas threatened by overgrowing and modifications of hydrological regime.

Objectives of LIFE Floodplain project are aiming at restoration of floodplain areas as habitat of



EU importance itself (e.g. habitats 6450, 6530*, 6270*, 6510) and for benefit of rare and endangered species that depend on these habitats, in particular *Crex crex**, *Gallinago media*, *Aquila pomarina** and *Osmoderma eremita**.

Project is implemented by Latvian Fund for Nature, in cooperation with 25 partners – Nature Protection board, Latvian Ornithological society, North Vidzeme Biosphere reserve and 22 municipalities. It is co-financed by UNDP/GEF and Ministry of Environment.

Project will deliver at least 2400 ha of restored and further managed floodplain areas, including habitats of EU importance, in particular *Northern Boreal alluvial meadows* 6450, *Fennoscandian wooded meadows* 6530*, *Fennoscandian lowland species rich grasslands* 6270* and others.

Due to the low level of awareness on Natura 2000 and nature conservation issues among stakeholders in Latvia, especially on local level, project is putting much emphasis on education and public awareness activities. More than 400 different articles have been published in national and local media during since the beginning of the project, with stories about floodplain restoration activities, nature values of the floodplains, Natura 2000, farmers living in protected areas etc. Several TV and radio broadcasts have been prepared during the project.

The main activity of the project is restoration of overgrown floodplain habitats. We have signed more than 200 contracts with landowners who are paid from our LIFE projects funds for restoration of their grasslands. Therefore, restoration work is done by landowners and managers of the lands, thus ensuring the ownership of the project results and further management of restored floodplains. Farmers are encouraged and supported in applying for EU Agri-environmental support to ensure further maintenance of restored areas.

More information about project activities is available on home pages of Latvian Fund for Nature www.ldf.lv and Latvian Ornithological society www.lob.lv.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Rationale and project territories

All the 16 project territories represent typical floodplain meadow areas, which are more or less regularly flooded. Because of this, these lands have never been used for intensive agricultural production. Most areas during 20th century have been partly improved (drained) to expand areas for hay production. However, starting with 80-ties a need for hay as cattle food during winter decreased and eventually became insignificant with collapse of collective farms operating under socialism system. This was because the number of cattle decreased more than 2 fold. As a result, a majority of 'less perspective lands for agriculture' (floodplain meadows) were abandoned and overgrowing process begun.

Since 1990-ies several countrywide inventory projects assessed biological values of the floodplain meadows using both site-based and species-based approaches. Floodplains were recognized as very important element of biological diversity, their existence crucial for numerous endangered and priority species, such as Corncrake *Crex crex**, Great Snipe *Gallinago media*, Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina**. All these species require open floodplain areas that are not overgrown with shrubs or trees.

1.2. Objectives of the project

Objectives of LIFE Floodplain project are aiming at restoration of floodplain areas as habitat of EU importance itself (e.g. habitats 6450, 6530*, 6510) and for benefit of rare and endangered species that depend on these habitats, in particular *Crex crex**, *Gallinago media*, *Aquila pomarina** and *Osmoderma eremita**.

1.3. The main conservation issues being addressed

Decrease and fragmentation of open grassland areas, degradation of meadow quality, overgrowing of oak stands

These problems are taking place due to increasing abandonment of extensive farming methods in rural areas and changes in the hydrological regime in the floodplains. They are addressed by several project activities, in particular habitat restoration actions and information/education measures, as well as support to farmers in applying for EU Agri-environmental funds.

Early grass mowing

Early grass mowing issue is addressed by educational activities, such as seminars and study tours. Requirements for receiving the financial support under Rural Development Plan Measure "Agri-environment", sub measure "Preservation of Biodiversity in Grasslands" are supporting the late grass mowing and thus providing incentive to cease early grass mowing practice in biologically valuable areas.

1.4. Expected results

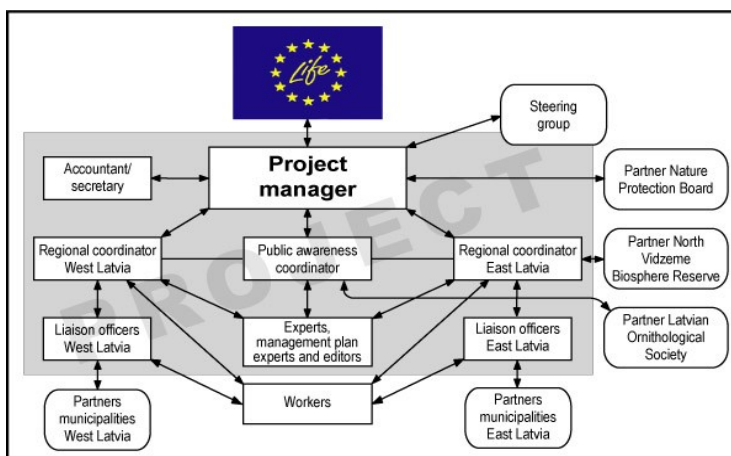
Expected results are: management plans prepared/elaborated for 15 Natura 2000 sites, at least 2400 ha of restored habitats, improved knowledge on Agri-Environmental Schemes and management of biologically valuable grasslands, all restored areas further managed with Agri-Environmental support.

2. LIFE-PROJECT FRAMEWORK

2.1. Steering Group

Steering Group consists of representatives of all project partners (22 municipalities, Nature Protection Board, Latvian Ornithological society, North Vidzeme biosphere reserve) and Ministry of Environment.

2.2. Roles of project partners



Partner Nature protection Board is implementing part of project actions A.5, A.6 and C.

Partner North Vidzeme biosphere reserve is advising on implementation of project actions in their territory and partly implementing project action A.7.

Partner Latvian Ornithological Society is partly implementing project actions E.1, E.2, E.3, E.7, E.8 and providing data on bird distribution in project territories.

Municipality partners are assisting with restoration and public awareness activities (C and E), liaison officers are assisting in daily communication with landowners and compilation of landowner database (A.2).

2.3. Modifications according to initial proposal

One Additional Clause have been accepted by the Commission (24/05/2006) when 3 new municipality partners were joining the project, there were also modifications in status of one of the existing partners and new co-financer (UNDP Latvia) contributing to the project.

Regional reform of municipalities is still taking place in Latvia. First Additional Clause to the Project (24.05.2006) was introduced as project partner Pilskalne municipality was replaced by Ilukste Regional Council (including also Pilskalne municipality). In addition to these changes, 3 more partners have changed their status since:

- Valgunde municipality has become Valgunde regional Council
- Dviete municipality has joined Ilukste regional Council
- Vecate municipality has joined Burtnieki regional Council

We will submit the request for modifications not later than 3 months before the end of the project, according Article 13 of the Standard Administrative Provisions.

3. PROGRESS

3.1. Summary table of activities during the whole project implementation period

Action No	Action	Time plan	Status
A.1.	Meetings with stakeholders on the sites, introduction of the project	IV 2004	Accomplished, 19 meetings took place in 2005 and 2 regional seminars in 2006.
A.2.	Development and maintenance of landowner database	IV 2004 – I 2008	In progress, frame created, data input and update taking place.
A.3	Collection and analysis of existing information	IV 2004 – IV 2007 ¹	In progress, continuing update with bird data from LOS.
A.4	Preparation of digital maps for project sites, mapping of habitats	II 2005 – II 2007	Accomplished, habitat maps attached with site management plans in Annex 19.
A.5	Preparation of 13 site management plans, update of 2 management plans	I 2005 – I 2007	Accomplished, site management plans finalised. Except the Plan for nature reserve “Lake Durbe meadows”, more info in Chapter 3.4.
A.6	Supervising preparation of the management plans, organising public hearings and printing plans	IV 2005 – I 2007	Accomplished, site management planning procedure (including public hearings) finalised and necessary copies made for responsible institutions.
A.7	Training of farmers on applying for EU support for grassland management	II 2005 – II 2008 ²	In progress, trainings will be accomplished in early 2008.
A.8	Analysis and recommendations of improvement of existing legislation regarding management planning in Latvia	III, IV 2005 IV 2007-I 2008	1st analysis done, recommendations communicated to MOE and MOA.
A.9	Agreements and contracts for habitat restoration and management works	I 2005, I 2006, I 2007	Accomplished. 226 contracts signed in total.
C.1.	Removal of shrub	I 2005 – I 2008	In progress, 1301 ha contracted, 770 ha completed.
C.2.	Destruction of shrub root system along melioration ditches	III 2005 – I 2008	In progress, contracts signed for 8 ha.
C.3.	Removal of shrub around individual oak trees	I 2005 – I 2008	In progress, 64 ha contracted, 56 ha completed.
C.4.	Fence installation	I-II 2006	Accomplished. Fences constructed.
C.5	Controlled burning of grassland	IV 2005 – I 2008	In progress. 413 ha contracted, 252 ha completed
C.6	Initial moving of grassland	III 2005 – III 2007	In progress. 2326 ha contracted, 1888 ha completed

¹ Deadline extended, according to request in Interim Report and EC letter DG ENV/E4/SL/SEB D(2006) 22466 on 22/11/2006

² Deadline extended, according to request during EC mission and EC letter DG ENV/E4/SL/SEB D(2006) 22466 on 22/11/2006

Action No	Action	Time plan	Status
E.1.	Informal letters and stakeholder meetings	I 2005 – II 2008	In progress, 3 letters send to each landowner.
E.2.	Design and update of project homepage	IV 2004 – II 2008	In progress.
E.3.	Information signs	I 2006 – I 2008	In progress, to date 18 information signs set up.
E.4.	Seminar for capacity building of meadow management planners	IV 2007	Delayed. Will be done early 2008, together with presentation of Grassland management handbook prepared within action E.6.
E.5.	Study tours to other grassland management areas in Latvia and EU, participation in international seminars	I 2005 – II 2007	Accomplished. In total 2 study tours organised, participation in 4 international conferences ensured.
E.6.	Production of grassland management handbook	II 2007 – I 2008	In progress. Authors of articles contracted, work in process.
E.7.	Production of summary management plans	I 2006, I 2007	Accomplished. In total 14 summary management plans printed. Those prepared in current reporting period please see attached in Annex 13.
E.8.	Informal booklets about project sites and management of habitats for <i>Crex crex</i> and other target species	I-II 2006, IV 2007- I 2008	In progress. 2 thematic booklets and 8 site booklets printed, more in preparation.
E.9.	Publication of layman's report	II 2008	Planned.
E.10	Closing event of the project	II 2008	Planned.
F.1.	Establishment and meetings of the Project Steering group, monitoring of project performance	IV 2004 – I 2008	In progress, 2 meetings took place.
F.2.	Initiation of the monitoring system on effects achieved by management measures	I 2005 – II 2008	In progress, monitoring taking place every spring.
F.3.	Administration of the project	IV 2004 – II 2008	In progress.
F.4.	Audit of the project	I-II 2008	Planned.

Explanations to different colours used in the table

	Actions that are fully implemented
	Actions that are in implementation, according the time plan
	Actions that are delayed
	Actions that have not yet begun, according to the time plan

3.2. Summary of project milestones

Milestone	No of reference action	Date planned	Date achieved
First meetings with landowners conducted	A.1	31.12.2004	14.01.2005
First Steering group meeting conducted	F.1	31.12.2004	27.04.2005
Homepage set up	E.2	31.12.2004	07.10.2004
First management plan elaboration meetings conducted	A.5, A.6	31.03.2005	14.01.2005
First management contracts signed	A.9	31.03.2005	23.12.2004
10% of planned shrub removed	C.1	31.03.2005	23.02.2005
20% of parkland meadows restored	C.3	31.03.2005	29.08.2005
First farmer training conducted	A.7	30.06.2005	07.03.2006
40% of planned area mown	C.6	31.08.2005	31.08.2006
50% of planned shrub removed	C.1	31.03.2006	31.03.2007
First km of fence made	C.4	30.06.2006	30.07.2007
Second farmer training conducted	A.7	30.06.2006	Delayed, trainings postponed to 2008
90% of planned shrub removed	C.1	31.03.2007	133% contracted, 79% complete 100% contracted 57% contracted, 50% complete 71% contracted, 43% complete
90% of planned shrub root destructed	C.2		
90% of parkland meadows restored	C.3		
100% of planned area burned	C.5		
100% (2395 ha) of meadows mown	C.6	31.08.2007	97% contracted, 79% complete
Meadow management training conducted	E.4	31.12.2007	
100% (112 ha) of parkland meadows restored	C.3	31.03.2008	
100% of planned shrub root destructed	C.2	31.03.2008	
100% (980 ha) of shrub removed	C.1	31.03.2008	
Notice boards set up	E.3	31.03.2008	18 stands already set up in project sites

	Milestone achieved
	Milestone not yet achieved
	Milestone not applicable to current report

3.3. Summary of deliverable products

Product	Name or n° of reference action	Deadline	ACCOMPLISHED	SUBMITTED TO EC
8 management plans completed	A.5 and A.6	31 March 2006	31 March 2006	CD with full text of management plans and summaries of MPs in English submitted with Interim Report.
8 summary management plans ready	E.7	31 March 2006	30 June 2006	7 Plans submitted with Interim Report.
First 10 booklets printed	E.8	30 June 2006	30 June 2007	Booklet "Birds in Floodplains" submitted with 1 st Progress Report, 3 site booklets submitted with Interim Report. Booklet "Floods" and 5 site booklets submitted with this Report, Annexes 14 and 15.
7 management plans completed	A.5 and A.6	31 March 2007	October 2007	CD with full text of 6 management plans and summaries of MPs in English submitted with this Report, Annexes 2 and 19.
7 summary management plans ready	E.7	31 March 2007	October 2007	7 summary management plans submitted with this Report, Annex 13.
Digital maps ready	A.4	30 June 2007	30 June 2007	Maps for 7 sites submitted with Interim Report. Maps for remaining sites submitted with this Report, included in Management plans (Annex 19)
All booklets printed	E.8	31 March 2008		
Legislation analysis complete	A.8	31 March 2008		1 st analysis submitted with Interim Report.
Management handbook complete	E.6	31 March 2008		
Layman's report ready	E.9	30 June 2008		

	Deliverable delivered
	Deliverable delayed
	Deliverable not applicable to current report

3.4. Detailed report on actions

A. Preparatory actions, elaboration of management plans and/or of action plan

ACTION A.1	Meetings with stakeholders on the sites, introduction of the project	
Time plan: IV 2004	Variations/complications/delays: No	Additional information: List of introduction meetings submitted with 1 st Progress report.

Progress: Individual and small-scale meetings are continuing throughout the project on daily basis.

ACTION A.2	Development and maintenance of landowner database	
Time plan: IV 2004 – I 2008	Variations/complications/delays: No	Additional information: No

Progress: The framework for the database has been set up; it is now in process of input and update of information. As planned in the project, it will be finalised and submitted to Ministry of Environment and Nature Protection Board in early 2008.

The inaccuracy of landowner information that is available is creating problems for preparation of the database and implementation of habitat restoration activities. In many cases even municipalities (that are believed to have most recent and updated information about land properties in their territory) have outdated and incomplete ownership information, or no contact information for landowners at all. Many landowners are living abroad, some have not finalised formal procedures of including their land in Land Cadastre etc. All these obstacles continuously create problems with contacting landowners for information, management planning and habitat restoration purposes.

ACTION A.3	Collection and analysis of existing information	
Time plan: IV 2004 – III 2005	Variations/complications/delays: Time plan should be extended to 2007 (need for this communicated during EC mission in Latvia, 5-6/07/2006) and in Interim report	Additional information: No

Progress: Accumulation of data will be finalised in 2007, with feeding the conclusions into Grassland management handbook that is under preparation now, within project action E.6. Data are used in daily decision making and were also incorporated in booklet “Floods. Floodplains” prepared within project action E.8.

Significant effort is put into collection of quantified data on nature values registered in the project sites, to gather the comparable data to create the data series in order to assess the success of the project actions. The data from Breeding Bird Atlas and Latvian IBA database is most valuable to obtain the background information on status of project sites before the project start. The above-mentioned information was crucial for site management plans (action A.5) in order to analyse the trends and monitor the habitats and species of EU and Latvian importance in longer time period (background information for site management plans and basis for planning any management activities on the sites).

Variations/complications/delays: Time plan extended to 2007, to ensure that more bird data is collected by Latvian Ornithological society to provide data series for longer time period (need for this communicated during EC mission in Latvia, 5-6/07/2006 and in Interim Report).

ACTION A.4	Preparation of digital maps for project sites, mapping of habitats of EU importance	
Time plan: II 2005 – II 2007	Variations/complications/delays: No	Additional information: Maps of Natura 2000 sites and initial project site borders were included in Interim Report. Habitat maps and other maps included in management plans (CD in Annex 19).

Progress: Action is accomplished. Digital mapping was done by project regional coordinators and project experts on daily basis – for mapping areas for restoration, preparing contracts, undertaking monitoring. GPS devices are used by regional coordinators and experts, to digitise all the site information on daily basis. Maps (habitat and species, management measures, site zoning, tourism infrastructure, hydrological, etc.) were prepared for all management plans (project action A.5).

Digital vector layers of full information topographic maps of scale 1:10000 are not yet available in Latvia, thus we have postponed planned purchase of these maps and wait for new information from State Land service. It is still unlikely that above mentioned maps will become available during project period, as only maps for Latvian border areas and larger cities have been prepared to date. We were using digital orthophotos (obtained from Nature Protection Board free of charge) and Landsat satellite images for digital mapping and assessing other options to obtain the necessary data. Digital Elevation Model was purchased in 2006 and used to model different flood scenarios for project sites, to plan the hydrological regime necessary for maintenance of biological values dependent on it. It proved to be very useful for management planning of project sites that are very dependent on regular floods and therefore these processes should be modelled to include relevant management measures in site management plans.

If such maps will become available, we will consider the option to purchase the spring 2008 aerial photos of project sites, within the planned budget of the action. This information would help us largely to evaluate and demonstrate the overall effect and scale of habitat restoration activities done by project for Final Report.

ACTION A.5	Preparation of 13 site management plans, update of 2 management plans	
Time plan: I 2005 – I 2007	Variations/complications/delays: See below	Additional information: Annex 1 - Pictures of project activities Annex 2 – Summary of 6 management plans in English Annex 19 – CD with 6 management plans prepared in 2006/2007 (in Latvian)

Progress: Action is accomplished. 6 more site management plans have been finalised and adopted by the Ministry of Environment during reporting period. Therefore, 13 site management plans have been finalised altogether, within the project. Management plan for project site “Meadows of Seda River” has been also finalised, this plan being financed by Latvian State forests outside the scope of the project (as planned before).

6 management plans that have been finalised during reporting period are following:

1. Burga meadows, approved by the Order of the Ministry of Environment No.91, 20.02.2007.
2. Lielupe floodplains, approved by the Order of the Ministry of Environment No. 72, 06.02.2007.
3. Pededzes lejtece, approved by the Order of the Ministry of Environment No. 605, 02.10.2007.
4. Ruja floodplains, approved by the Order of the Ministry of Environment No. 91, 20.02.2007.
5. Rakupe meadows, approved by the Order of the Ministry of Environment No. 362, 06.06.2007.
6. Svetes lejtece, approved by the Order of the Ministry of Environment No. 279, 26.04.2007.

Therefore, all the planned site management plans (except plan for project site “Lake Durbe meadows”) are finalised and approved by the Ministry of Environment.

The process for preparation of site management plan for project site “Lake Durbe meadows” was started in 2005. The management plan is prepared by project partner Latvian Ornithological society. The procedure of preparation of site management plans (Rules of Cabinet of Ministers No. 686, 9.10.2007.) foresees that local municipalities and other stakeholders should be involved in elaboration of the site management plans. According the procedure, management plan supervisory group was established, including representatives of local municipalities - Durbe regional council and Dunalka municipality.

Several meetings have taken place during the process of management planning for Lake Durbe meadows:

- 24.04.2006 – informative meeting for stakeholders
- 24.07.2006 – 1st management plan supervisory board meeting
- 13.09.2006 – 2nd management plan supervisory board meeting
- 05.12.2006 – 3rd management plan supervisory board meeting
- 09.03.2007 – 4th (extended) management plan supervisory board meeting with representatives from Nature Protection board, Regional Environmental board, Ministry of Environment
- 04.07.2007 – 5th management plan supervisory board meeting
- 27.09.2007 – 6th management plan supervisory board meeting

Unfortunately, during the preparation process of the site management plan the conflict between nature conservation and local economic development interests developed. In spite of prolonged management planning process (more meetings than usually held) and repeated consultations with participation from state institutions (Nature Protection Board and Ministry of Environment) and local municipalities, it was not possible to reach agreement on zoning and protection regime of the site. Therefore, site management plan could not be finalised and submitted to the Ministry of Environment for approval.

According to Latvian legislation, unless site management plan is prepared and Individual site protection rules (Rule of Cabinet of Ministers, prepared separately for each protected site, if necessary³) are in place, the protection regime of nature reserves is prescribed by the General Rule of Cabinet of Ministers No.415 (22.07.2003). This Rule prescribes prohibited actions for all protected areas, depending on the category (Nature Reserve, Nature Park or other). Therefore, in order to ensure necessary protection regime of the site, in situation when no nature friendly agreement could be reached with municipality, it is advised to maintain the General protection regime for the site (that is providing the necessary restrictions to ensure maintenance of value of the Natura 2000 site). To summarise the situation – the site management plan will not be finalised and Individual Protection Rules for site will not be prepared. The necessary protection regime is ensured by General Protection Rule, which is the best available solution for the given situation.

³ There are some sites that do not require Individual Protection Rules, usually small and less complex sites with unified values and no need for specific regulations and zoning. Several of the project sites (e.g. Burga meadows, Kalnciems meadows) do not require Individual Protection Rules.

Please see copies of all finalised management plans (in Latvian) attached in CD in Annex 19. Summaries of these plans have been translated to English and are attached in Annex 2. They are also available on project home page. Management plans have been distributed to Nature Protection Board, Ministry of Environment, State Forest service, Regional Environmental Boards, local municipalities and State Stock Company “Latvian Forests”. Management plans in Latvian are also available on project website www.ldf.lv, under sections of individual project sites and on home page of Nature Protection Board www.dap.gov.lv. Printed summaries of management plans (in Latvian) prepared in 2006/2007 have been sent to all landowners (please see more information in description of action E.7).

For those sites where Individual Site Protection Rules were necessary, we have initiated the process of preparing these rules. Individual Site Protection Rules are already adopted for 4 sites:

- Mugurve meadows, approved by Cabinet of Ministers by Regulation No.245 on 10.04.2007.
- Sita and Pededze floodplain, approved by Cabinet of Ministers by Regulation No.168 on 06.03.2007.
- Dviete floodplain, approved by Cabinet of Ministers by Regulation No.274 on 24.04.2007.
- Burtnieki meadows, approved by Cabinet of Ministers by Regulation No.60 on 16.01.2007.

3 more are in preparation – for project sites Lielupe floodplains, Raķupe meadows and Svetes lejtece.

Project regional coordinator Janis Reihmanis has been elected as representative of Latvian Fund for Nature in the Lielupe River Basin Consultative Board (Order of Minister of Environment on <http://www.meteo.lv/public/28446.html>). There are 4 River Basin Consultative Boards in Latvia – one for each of the River Basins (Gauja, Daugava, Lielupe and Venta). Until 2009 it is planned to set the water quality goals and prepare programs for their achievement. As member of Lielupe Consultative board we take active part in preparation of assessments and programs, including submitting the project data, when required. Introduction meeting took place on 28.04.2006, in Jelgava. On 7.12.2006 the first meeting of members of Lielupe River Basin Consultative Board took place.

Variations/complications/delays: Initially it was planned that 15 management plans will be prepared/updated. Due to changes in project site Vidusburtnieks⁴ number of management plans is reduced by 1, although the area covered by the plan has increased. Site management plan for project site “Lake Durbe meadows” have been prepared, but will not be submitted to the Ministry of Environment for approval. It should be emphasized that in case of Lake Durbe meadows the protection status of the site values is ensured by General Protection regime that is the best solution in the given situation when site values are endangered by local development plans.

⁴ Number of project sites has decreased from 16 to 15 as 2 sites proposed for Natura 2000 network – Vidusburtnieks 1 and Vidusburtnieks 2 were joined in 1 during the official procedure of Natura 2000 site establishment. Total area of Vidusburtnieks has increased from 279 ha (previously planned 2 sites) to 1333 ha (finally established 1 site).

ACTION A.6	Supervising preparation of the management plans, organising public hearings and printing plans	
Time plan: IV 2005 – I 2007	Variations/complications/delays: No	Additional information: Annex 1 – Pictures of the project activities

Progress: Action is accomplished. Public hearing meetings for all management plans (except project site “Lake Durbe meadows”, please see explanation in description of action A.5) have been organised. They were announced in local newspapers, project web site www.ldf.lv and local municipalities.

Public hearing meetings took place of following dates:

1. Lielupe floodplains, 02.11.2006.
2. Ruja floodplains, 16.11.2006.
3. Burga meadows, 17.11.2006.
4. Svetes lejtece, 19.12.2006.
5. Rakupe meadows, 08.03.2007.
6. Pededzes lejtece, 08.05.2007.

ACTION A.7	Training of farmers on applying for EU support for grassland management	
Time plan: II 2005, II 2006	Variations/complications/delays: Time plan extended to II 2008 and tourism training added (letter DG ENV/E4/SL/nb D(2006) 16847 on 24.08.2006)	Additional information: <u>Interim Report</u> – report of the seminar “Maintenance of biodiversity in rural areas Annex 1 – Pictures of the project activities Annex 4 - Report on Tourism seminars

Progress: 2 regional seminars “Economic alternatives for Natura 2000 sites – tourism” took place on 12 and 13 October, 2006. These seminars took place in Western and Eastern Latvia to ensure maximum accessibility for the local stakeholders. The land owners of the project territories that are planning or already engaged in tourism activities in project sites, as well as municipal authorities, regional planners and officials from Tourism Information Centers were invited as participants in the both seminars. Each seminar had about 40 participants; this fact underlines the urgency of the topic and fact that many people are willing to relate their further activities with tourism industry. More detailed report on the seminars please see attached in Annex 4.

Variations/complications/delays: It was agreed that due to uncertainty about the supported agri-environmental measures in Rural Development Programme (as Latvian RDP is still in the process of negotiation with EC) the updated content of trainings will be assessed after the Rural Development Programme will be adopted. Currently, the RDP is still in the process of negotiations and we do not have the information about planned approval dates (unofficially the end of 2007 is mentioned). Therefore, we propose, that regardless the status of Latvian RDP, we will organise 3 regional seminars in January/February 2008 that will address the measures of RDP (in general or in more detail if RDP approved) and management methods for restoration and maintenance of habitats for project target species.

ACTION A.8	Analysis and recommendations of improvement of existing legislation regarding management planning in Latvia	
Time plan: III, IV 2005, IV 2007-I 2008	Variations/complications/delays: No.	Additional information: <u>Interim Report</u> – Analysis of legislation Annex 5 – letters from MOE and MOA on recommendations

Progress: The action is in process. First analysis of legislation was done in 2006 and recommendations sent to responsible ministries (as reported in Interim Report). Replies were received from Ministries on 11.08.2006 (from Ministry of Environment) and on 29.08.2006 (from Ministry of Agriculture). Please find them attached in Annex 5 (in Latvian). As expected, these replies are rather formal and we shall follow up that our recommendations are not left on the bookshelves in both ministries. Therefore, we plan to do the repeated assessment of legislation and improvements in the field of our recommendations in early 2008 and follow up the process with repeated letters to the both ministries.

We are still working on policy level in Latvia, participating in preparation of new Rural Development Plan for Latvia (2007-2013), to ensure that floodplain management issues are taken up in this plan.

ACTION A.9	Agreements and contracts for habitat restoration and management works	
Time plan: I 2005, I 2006, I 2007	Variations/complications/delays: No	Additional information: <u>1st Progress Report</u> - examples of contracts with translation of main parts of contracts

Progress: Action is accomplished. In total, 226 contracts were signed for restoration of 4112 ha of habitats that are divided in 4 major restoration actions:

- C.1 – 980 ha planned, 1301 ha contracted
- C.2 – 8 ha planned, 8 ha contracted
- C.3 – 112 ha planned, 64 ha contracted
- C.5 – 580 ha planned, 413 ha contracted
- C.6 – 2395 ha planned, 2326 ha contracted

The contracted areas in total are larger than initially planned (4067 ha) in the project, but we expect that not all the contracts will be finalised in full extent (due to weather conditions, flooding situation, lack of machinery and other human factors). Please see more info on contract implementation in description of implementation of C actions.

C. Non-recurring management

Actions in this section are dealing with habitat restoration. To date, 226 habitat restoration contracts have been signed already, for restoration of 41 12 ha of overgrown habitats.

Summary table on progress with implementation of habitat restoration activities

Habitat restoration method	Ha contracted	% contracted, from total planned in project	Ha completed	% completed, from total planned in project
C.1 – shrub cutting	1301	133	770	79
C.2 – destruction of shrub roots	8	100	0	0
C.3 – shrub cutting around oak trees	64	57	56	50
C.5 – controlled burning	413	71	252	43
C.6 – initial mowing	2326	97	1888	79
TOTAL:	4112		2966	

As seen from the table, habitat restoration works are contracted in larger volume than initially planned in the project. We expect that not all the contracts will be completed – due to different factors influencing their implementation – e.g. lack of machinery, flooding of the sites, poor accessibility etc. As we see rather often in project implementation process, local people tend to underestimate the difficulties of restoration of these very difficult territories and sign up for contracts that they are later not able to fulfil.

The areas contracted for shrub cutting around oak trees (C.3) is smaller than initially planned, this discrepancy is created mainly due to situation in project site “Pededzes lejtece”, the site where most of the restoration action (85 ha) for C.3 was planned. Please see more information in description of action C.3.

The area contracted for controlled burning (C.5) is smaller than planned, due to the fact that it could be only started when included in management plans of the project sites, therefore for most of the sites it could only be started in 2006 or 2007.

At the same time, more areas than initially planned have been contracted for shrub cutting (C.1) and this compensates for the overall areas to be restored. It has to be emphasized that it was impossible to plan exact areas for restoration during project proposal writing phase when site management plans were not prepared and exact habitat maps not available for any of the project sites. Therefore, we are aiming at reaching the total area planned for restoration, but allowing changes between different restoration methods and habitats.

Completion of restoration works are taking more time than initially planned in the project. It was expected that works would be completed within max one year from the date of contract signing. As we see now, in reality it takes more time, especially in the final phase of restoration - removal of bushes and hay. Also there are many contracts where most of the work is done, but final payment is due to the fact that bushes are not totally removed, or some other minor remarks received from regional coordinators. Additionally, there are extensions to the contracts due to difficult weather conditions and other practical considerations.

All these obstacles were not foreseen in the planning phase due to the fact that to date actually no projects have been undertaking restoration works on such scale and arrangements as in our project. **Nevertheless, we are sure that overall project goal of restoration of 2400 original⁵ ha of habitats will be achieved by the end of the project.**

Fence installation (C.4) has been contracted earlier than planned, and in more sites than initially planned in the project. Additional fence were constructed in Pilssala, project site “Lielupe floodplains”.

Project activities in Pilssala have high demonstration value and already initiated a lot of interest in nature conservation and Natura 2000 issues. We organised habitat restoration event in summer 2006 that was very popular and valuable in both aspects – practical restoration and public involvement/education. Please see more information in description to action C.1.

Link between the project actions as regards agri-environmental schemes. All habitat restoration contracts are including obligation for landowner or land user to apply for agri-environmental support after restoration - to ensure further maintenance of restored habitats (usually chapter 2.12 of the contract). Contractor also confirms that he/she is not receiving any double funding for restoration of the habitats mentioned in the contract (usually chapter 2.11 in the contract). Thus we ensure that funds invested in restoration of habitats are not wasted, as they are further managed and serve the purpose of maintenance of EU importance habitats and species.

Please see the location of all restoration actions that are contracted to date on map in Annex 18.

⁵ The term of “original” hectares can be explained by table in page 18/3 of project proposal. There are very heavy overgrown areas where up to 4 restoration actions are overlapping. There are also areas where it is enough to use just one restoration method. Therefore, it was planned that 2400 hectares of habitat will be restored, but restoration hectares are much more if summarizing total hectares for each of restoration actions (C.1, C.2, C.3, C.5 and C.6).

ACTION C.1		Removal of shrub
Time plan: I 2005 – I 2008	Variations/complications/delays: Proceeding slightly slower than planned	Additional information: Annex 1 – Pictures of the project activities Annex 3 – Report on restoration event in Pilssala Annex 18 – Maps of project activities

Progress: This action is proceeding well, with contracted areas significantly larger than initially planned in the project. 133% of planned area has been already contracted for restoration and for 79% of total planned area contracts have been already finalised.

Implementation of the restoration actions (especially shrub cutting) is very much dependent on weather conditions (layer of snow, flooding periods etc) thus the finalisation of works takes more time than initially foreseen in the project. We have also set high quality standards for restoration works and do not accept the finalisation of works until all the bushes are removed and restored area is of good quality. All this delays the final acceptance of completed works in part of the areas, but we are confident that by the end of the project the area restored will be as planned (or more).

In addition to contracting landowners for restoration of lands on their properties, we have organised habitat restoration event in summer 2006 that was very popular and provided much publicity for the project. It took place in Pilssala, project site “Lielupe floodplains” – in the centre of Jelgava city. The event very successfully achieved 2 goals – practical restoration goal and public involvement/education goal. Within this event 0.5 ha of floodplain meadow was restored (bushes cut) and event was attended by 42 volunteers, city major, journalists, students and local people who altogether worked for restoration of floodplain, cutting and piling bushes. Please see more information on this event in report in Annex 3. Further management of this site will be ensured by Latvian Fund for Nature, as we have started the grazing activities in the area (please see more info in action C.4).

We are discussing the option to use the same approach for restoration (open public event) of few of those areas where landowners do not have the capacity for restoration (no machinery, old age, no interest) themselves, but that would be crucial for biological diversity. If more such events will take place, they will be organised early 2008.

Please see project actions on maps in Annex 18.

ACTION C.2		Destruction of shrub root system along melioration ditches
Time plan: III 2005 – I 2008	Variations/complications/delays: Proceeding slower than planned	Additional information: Annex 1 – Pictures of the project activities Annex 18 – Maps of project activities

Progress: This action is of experimental character and done in small areas. 8 ha of works have been contracted, in 3 project sites: “Svetes lejtece”, “Burga meadows” and “Sita and Pededze floodplain”. The action is complicated due to lack of appropriate machinery; contractors are testing different machines and approaches to removal of shrub roots. The action will be completed by the end of the project.

ACTION C.3	Removal of shrub around individual oak trees	
Time plan: I 2005 – I 2008	Variations/complications/delays: Smaller area than planned	Additional information: Annex 1 – Pictures of the project activities Annex 18 – Maps of project activities

Progress: Contracts for restoration of 64 ha of Fennoscandian wooded meadows have been signed to date and 56 ha have been already restored. Shrubs are being removed from surroundings of oak trees. It is mainly done manually; cut wood is removed from the area.

Variations/complications/delays: The areas contracted for shrub cutting around oak trees (C.3) is smaller than initially planned, this discrepancy is created mainly due to situation in project site “Pededzes lejtece”, the site where most of the restoration action (85 ha) for C.3 was planned. During the site management planning process (action A.5), when habitat distribution and areas were precisely mapped, the area of Fennoscandian wooded meadows (6530*) were reported to be smaller than initially planned in the project. Part of this habitat have been overgrown for longer time period and transformed to Oak forests (9160). This influenced also the extent of habitat restoration actions, with only 45 ha contracted for restoration instead of 85 ha planned.

ACTION C.4	Fence installation	
Time plan: I-II 2006	Variations/complications/delays: More fences constructed	Additional information: Annex 1 – Pictures of the project activities Annex 18 – Maps of project activities

Progress: Additional fence was constructed in Pilssala, project site “Lielupe floodplains” in June 2007. The total length of the fence is 1585 m, it fences ca 80 ha of area where grazing is taking place since 2007. Konik horses were delivered to the site on 29.08.2007, as result of project cooperation with “Ark Foundation”, the Netherlands. Konik horses is the breed of wild horses that are capable of grazing outdoors also during winter. Wide public interest have been received on this occasion as this is the first case in Latvia when wild horses are grazing in the centre of the major city. The city major personally welcomed horses in Pilssala. We have signed the agreement with one of the local inhabitants about taking care of the fence and horses in Pilssala. Currently there are 16 horses grazing in area, forming the basis for long-term maintenance of the site.

Variations/complications/delays: More fences have been built than initially planned, this change have been approved by EC (letter ENV/E4/SL/nb D(2007) 7989 from 10/05/2007).

ACTION C.5	Controlled burning of grassland	
Time plan: IV 2005 – I 2008	Variations/complications/delays: Smaller areas than planned	Additional information: Annex 1 – Pictures of the project activities Annex 18 – Maps of project activities

Progress: To date, 413 ha have been contracted for controlled burning (71% of planned in project), 252 ha have been completed (43%). Please see maps in Annex 18 for locations of restoration activities.

According to Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers “On the General Protection and Use of Specially Protected Nature Territories”, No 415, adopted 22.07.2003, in nature reserves and nature parks (all project sites are either nature reserves or nature parks) it is prohibited to “burn grass and reed, except in cases if it is necessary for undertaking the management measures

foreseen in management plan of the site and approved by the administration of protected area or regional environmental board” (chapters 16.8 and 18.4 of the Regulation).

Variations/complications/delays: Action is implemented in smaller areas than initially planned, due to the legislation restrictions (Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No 415, 22.07.2003) that prevented us from starting the action before site management plans. Therefore, this action was possible to begin only in 2006 when first management plans were adopted and included management measure “controlled burning”.

ACTION C.6	Initial moving of grassland	
Time plan: III 2005 – III 2007	Variations/complications/delays: Delayed, final acceptance of works in process	Additional information: Annex 1 – Pictures of the project activities Annex 18 – Maps of project activities

Progress: This action is the largest of all restoration actions. In total, 2326 ha have been contracted for initial mowing (97% of planned in project), 1888 ha (79%) of them already finalised. Remaining areas are currently in the process of assessment and will be visited by regional coordinators in 2007 for final acceptance of works. Please see maps in Annex 18 for location of restoration activities.

Variations/complications/delays: The finalisation of contracts is still in the process. Restoration works were delayed mainly due to fact that landowners are not experienced in evaluation of time needed for this type of works and were underestimating the scale of the work. Deadlines of many contracts thus were prolonged to October 2007 and currently the amount of areas to be visited for final approval of restoration works is higher than regional coordinators are able to do in planned time.

Problems with restoration also occur due to incorrect and outdated land ownership information available in municipalities. Some landowners are not possible to locate and discuss habitat restoration options with them. This problem is described more in detail in description to action A.2.

E. Public awareness and dissemination of results

Public awareness coordinator has been working intensively on promoting project activities and Natura 2000 issues in Latvia. More than 160 different articles have been published on different levels (from regional to national newspapers) during Reporting Period. 11 TV broadcasts has also been shown on different televisions, with stories about floodplain restoration in project sites, wild horses in Pilssala and other related issues. 11 radio broadcasts have taken place during reporting period with information about tourism, nature values and wild horses in project sites. Please see the list of publications in different media attached in Annex 20.

Dissemination and networking with other LIFE projects in Latvia and abroad is important component for strengthening the project and improving the overall effectiveness of LIFE Programme. Project manager has been included in the Steering Group of the LIFE-Nature project “Marine Protected Areas in the Eastern Baltic Sea”, implemented by Baltic Environmental Forum. Project regional coordinator Ainars Aunins have been working in the consultative board of Lubana fund that was established within the LIFE-Nature project “Management of Lubana wetland complex”. We have cooperation with LIFE projects also outside Latvia, regional coordinator participated in seminar organized by LIFE project “Lafnitz – cross-linking habitats along an Alpine-Pannonian river” in Austria and visit was paid to project by Slovakian LIFE project “Restoration and Management of Sand Dunes Habitats in Zahorie Military Training Area”. Project partners and staff visited Finnish LIFE project “Management of wetlands along the Gulf of Finland migratory flyway” during our study tour to Finland. Summary of experience of European LIFE projects dealing with grassland management and restoration will be included in Grassland management handbook prepared within project action E.6.

As before, much emphasis is put on individual contacts with landowners, different publications, campaigns and other information and education activities.

Project staff has attended different meetings with presentations about LIFE-Floodplain project, more information in description to action E.1. Home page of Latvian Fund for Nature and Latvian Ornithological society has been serving as good tool to disseminate information about floodplain nature values and project activities, more information and home page statistics please see in description to action E.2.

18 information stands have been set up in 9 project sites. Please see more information in description to action E.3.

Very important tool for exchange of information and dissemination of experience is Study tours and international seminars. Project staff has participated in 3 study tours and 4 international seminars during reporting period. Please see more information in description to action E.5.

5 site booklets, booklet “Floods. Floodplains” and 7 summary management plans have been printed and distributed to municipalities, tourism information centers, landowners and protected areas administrations. Please see more information about project booklets and summary management plans in description to actions E.7 and E.8.

ACTION E.1		Informal letters and stakeholder meetings
Time plan: I 2005 – II 2008	Variations/complications/delays: No	Additional information: <u>Interim report</u> - examples of landowner letters and project envelopes Annex 20 – Publications and educational events (in Latvian)

Progress: Project staff is participating in various small-scale individual meetings and stakeholder negotiations on daily basis. Project regional coordinators are discussing with local stakeholders about management and restoration measures before contracts are signed, project manager is discussing with local majors (and liaison officers) about their participation in the project and further activities to be taken, financial assistant is having regular communication with project liaison officers on regular reports about municipality participation in the project. All these meetings are small scale and taking place when necessary, according to project activities.

In addition, we are addressing also other audiences that are interacting with local landowners and decision-makers on daily basis, such as rural consultants, media and tourism operators. Most important meetings with presentation and input with of our project experience during reporting period have been the following:

- Site management planning seminar organized by Nature Protection Board on 21-22.09.2006.
- Project meeting of the LIFE-Nature project “Marine Protected Areas in the Eastern Baltic Sea” on 14.11.2006.
- Scientific conference of the North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve on 23.11.2006.
- Conference organized by project “Restoration of Biodiversity in Military site and Natura 2000 site “Adazi”” on 5.06.2007.
- Seminar “Building Nordic-Baltic partnerships in grassland farming for biodiversity” on 11-12.10.2007.

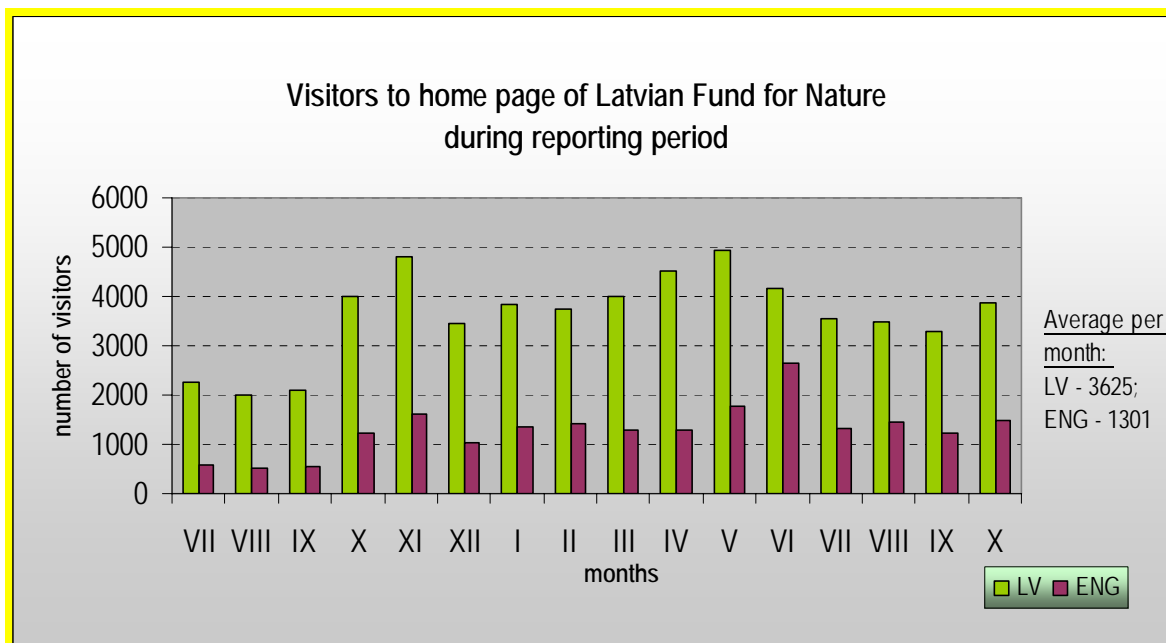
Public awareness coordinator has participated in 15 national educational events with floodplain conservation and nature tourism message; please see them listed at the end of the table in Annex 20.

ACTION E.2		Design and update of project homepage
Time plan: IV 2004 – II 2008	Variations/complications/delays: No	Additional information: Annex 6 - printouts of latest project news and project main page Printouts of earlier news included in previous reports

Progress: 45 news items have been posted on project home page during reporting period. Most of the news are posted in both Latvian and English. Please see printouts of latest news (time period 1/07/2006 – 30/09/2007) attached in Annex 6.

Project home page has been established within homepage of Latvian Fund for Nature www.ldf.lv. It contains general information about project (with information about project goals, nature values, Natura 2000, general publications, socio-economic context of the project, news archive and photos), and sub-sections for each of the project sites. Site sub-sections can be accessed by clicking on site names in the introduction of the project. We include all site-specific information into respective sub-sections, e.g. general information about site, management plans (draft working versions and final approved ones, English summaries), announcements, project

publications (booklets, MP summaries, information stands), maps with habitats and management activities and pictures of the sites. According to recommendation in letter DG ENV/E4/SL/SEB D(2006) 22466 on 22.11.2006, we have included Natura 2000 logo on welcome page of Latvian Fund for Nature. The statistics of the home page during the reporting period please see below.



Project homepage have been also set up within homepage of Latvian Ornithological Society www.lob.lv, this home page is focusing more on floodplain protection from the bird perspective.

ACTION E.3	Information signs	
Time plan: I 2006 – I 2008	Variations/complications/delays: No	Additional information: Annex 1 – Pictures of the project activities

Progress: To date, 18 information stands have been set up in project sites Sita and Pededze floodplains, Mugurve meadows, Dviete floodplain, Burtnieki meadows, Burga meadows, Meadows of Seda river, Vidusburtnieks meadows, Ruja floodplains and Rakupe meadows.

Information that is included in information signs is always communicated to local municipalities and their comments incorporated. Stands contain information about Natura 2000, LIFE Floodplain project, local municipalities, site protection rules, nature values, habitat restoration activities, and tourism attractions in the region. They are developed according the visual identity guidelines developed for all Natura 2000 sites by Nature Protection board and North Vidzeme Biosphere reserve. Stands are placed on wooden poles, with wooden roof. The size of each stand is 1100x1600 cm.

Please see pictures of the information signs attached in Annex 1. Pictures and designs of the information stands are also available on project home page www.ldf.lv, under sub-sections of respective sites.

ACTION E.4	Seminar for capacity building of meadow management planners	
Time plan: IV 2007	Variations/complications/delays: Yes	Additional information: No

Variations/complications/delays: We would like to link this seminar with presentation of the “Grassland management handbook” that is being prepared within project action E.6 and will be finalised in 1st quarter of 2008. Therefore, we kindly ask you to accept the delay with implementation of this action in order to provide for more effective implementation of both, E.4 and E.6 actions.

ACTION E.5	Study Tours to other grassland management areas in Latvia and EU, participation in international seminars on grassland management	
Time plan: I 2005 – II 2007	Variations/complications/delays: No	Additional information: <u>1st Progress report</u> , Annexes 7-11, Study tour reports from Norway, Lubans, Matsalu, Finland and Austria. <u>Interim Report</u> , Annexes 8-10, reports on Belarus ST, Denmark conference and Green Week 2006. Annex 1 – Pictures of the project activities Annex 7- Study tour report from Finland Annex 8 - Study tour report from Sweden Annex 9 - Green Week 2007 report Annex 10 - Conference report Switzerland Annex 11- Conference report Austria Annex 12 - Conference report Netherlands Annex 22 – Project posters

Progress: Action is progressing well. Project staff and partners are taking part in different events both in Latvia and Europe.

On 1-2.08.2007 project manager and project regional coordinator Ainars Aunins participated in **short study tour** to Estonia, Karula National Park. Meeting with administration of the National park was organised and discussions about different management methods for Great Snipe and Corncrake took place during visits to restored and managed floodplain areas in Karula National Park. The area hosts significant proportion of Great Snipe population in Estonia, thus the experience gained was very interesting and useful in implementation of our project. This study tour was followed up by visit of Estonian experts and representatives of scientific institutions to project site Sita and Pededze floodplain on 11-12.09.2007 when discussions continued and project experience and achievements were demonstrated and discussed.

2nd Study tour for project partners was organised in 15-17 August 2006 and targeted at grassland management experience in Finland. It was attended by project staff and project partners, with 39 participants (including representatives from municipalities, nature protection governmental institutions, most active landowners, media and project staff). Participants of the study tour visited Helsinki eco-city and Finnish LIFE project “Management of wetlands along the Gulf of Finland migratory flyway”. Report of this study tour please find attached in Annex 7.

3rd Study tour for project partners was organised 24-26 August 2007 and targeted the grassland management experience in Svartadalen valley, Sweden. Main target group of this study tour was project partners, mainly local municipalities. 39 participants (representatives from municipalities, protected area administrations, most active landowners, media and project staff) took place in this Study Tour. Report of this study tour please find attached in Annex 8.

Information about the study tours was also published on project home page www.ldf.lv. Please see pictures from study tours attached in Annex 1 to this report.

During the reporting period, in addition to participation in study tours, project staff has participated in 4 **international seminars** targeted at issues related to floodplain management, monitoring and public involvement.

On 6-7.11.2006 project regional coordinator Janis Reihmanis participated in seminar in Buchschachen, Austria “Sustainable agriculture, water management supported by LIFE in Natura 2000 sites across Europe”, that was organised by the LIFE project “Lafnitz – cross-linking habitats along an Alpine-Pannonian river”. Please find the report of the seminar attached in Annex 11.

On 12-15.06.2007 project manager and public awareness coordinator participated in EU Green Week in Brussels. This was the second year of project participation in this event and this year we prepared a stand describing project goals, activities and main problems. This event was very useful in establishing new contacts and finding similar activities elsewhere. Also presentations and discussions of the Green Week were very inspiring in our future work, especially for different ideas related to improvement of the ecological status of the sites and minimizing the ecological footprint of human activities. Please find the seminar report attached in Annex 9 and pictures of the stand in Annex 1 to this Report.

On 3-6.09.2007 project regional coordinator Ainars Aunins participated in conference "Monitoring the effectiveness of Nature conservation" in Switzerland that was organized by Swiss Federal Research Institute. A poster of the project “Impact of floodplain restoration on populations of Corncrake and Great Snipe in Latvia” was presented during the conference. Approval for participation in this conference was received on 04.07.2007 in e-mail from desk officer Sylvie Ludain. Please find the report of the conference with main findings and discussion attached in Annex 10.

On 8-12.07.2007 project regional coordinators Ainars Aunins and Janis Reihmanis took place in IALE World Congress “25 years Landscape Ecology: Scientific Principles in Practice” that was organized in Wageningen, The Netherlands. The seminar was organized by the International Association for Landscape Ecology (IALE). Project regional coordinators participated in congress poster session Theme 11: *Landscape for Life*, with poster presentation “Restoration of Latvian floodplains for EU priority species and habitats”. Please find the report of the conference and lessons learnt attached in Annex 12.

Project posters (in smaller scale) please see in Annex 22. Pictures from international conferences please see in Annex 1.

To summarize different events where project staff has participated and compare them to planned, please see the table below:

Planned:	6 short study tours for project staff	3 study tours for project partners	5 international seminars
Already taken place:	5 study tours (Lubans, Engure, Norway, Belarus and Estonia)	3 study tours: - Matsalu, Estonia - Finland - Svartadalen, Sweden	8 seminars (Finland, 2 Austria, Denmark, 2 EU Green Week, Netherlands, Switzerland)

Although project staff has participated in more seminars than initially planned, the budget of the action has not been exceeded. All these seminars have been very important in both, learning and experience sharing, aspects. Findings from seminars and study tours have resulted in better implementation of the project, for example grazing schemes in Pilssala (project site “Lielupe

floodplains”) were transferred from experience learned during project 2nd Study Tour in Finland where similar methods were used for maintenance of grasslands in cities.

On 8-9.06.2007 experts from LIFE project “Restoration and Management of Sand Dunes Habitats in Zahorie Military Training Area” in Slovakia visited several project sites. Guided by project public awareness coordinator, Slovakian experts learned about restoration and management methods and effects of these measures on floodplains.

1-day excursion to Burtnieki meadows was organised on 9.06.2007 by Ltd.”Impro Ceļojumi” with 42 participants. Another 2-day excursion was organised on 14-15.07.2007, by the same company, to project site “Dviete floodplain”. Both events were follow-up of our activities on advertising project sites as ecotourism destination and thus providing for development of nature friendly activities there.

ACTION E.6	Production of grassland management handbook	
Time plan: II 2007 – I 2008	Variations/complications/delays: No	Additional information: No

Progress: Action has started, according to the time plan. As recommended during EC mission on 5-6/07/2006, we will assess also the experience of other LIFE projects dealing with grassland management and restoration, as part of the handbook. The contributors to the handbook have been contracted and will provide their texts by the end of November. Further editing of the texts will take place in December and January; we plan to publish the handbook by the end of February 2008.

ACTION E.7	Production of summary management plans	
Time plan: I 2006, I 2007	Variations/complications/delays: Yes, see below	Additional information: Annex 13 - Printed summary management plans

Progress: Summary management plans have been produced for 7 project sites, printed on environmentally friendly paper produced in Latvia, in full colour. They have been prepared by hired experts, edited and supervised by project public awareness coordinator. Please find them attached in Annex 13 to this Report. Summary management plans have been sent to all landowners in project sites. Typical content of the summary management plan is following:

1. Introduction
2. Description of territory
3. What is Natura 2000?
4. Species and habitats in the area
5. Site protection goals
6. Protection rules in the site
7. Management measures in the site
8. Information for visitors
9. Information about LIFE project is included on back cover of each publication

Summaries of the management plans are also published on project website www.ldf.lv.

Variations/complications/delays: Each of the summary plans has been printed in 200 copies, instead of 500 planned (except for summary for Dviete floodplain, where 500 copies were printed). In total, 2900 copies have been printed to date (all sites, except “Lake Durbe meadows”, see below) instead of 8000 copies planned. There is no need for printing these

summaries in more copies, as it is targeted specifically on land managers and municipalities. We have assessed the number of landowners per site and decided that there is no need to print excess copies that would not be necessary. Given the lower number of copies printed and resources saved, we have included more information than initially planned (in average, publications consist of 16 pages, A.4 format, full colour, printed on environmentally friendly paper).

The situation with project site “Lake Durbe meadows” that is described in Action A.5 poses the question of further activities concerning publications about the site that are related to the management plan. In this regard, we propose to prepare and publish the summary management plan about the site anyway, regardless the legal status of the site management plan (A.5). The reason for this decision is that summary management plans are important and detailed source of information for local landowners about recommended management methods, main values of the sites etc. All this information is available in the prepared management plan and would help landowners to plan their management actions in the site and thus stimulate nature friendly site management.

ACTION E.8	Informal booklets about project sites and management of habitats for <i>Crex crex</i>* and other target species	
Time plan: I-II 2006, IV 2007- I 2008	Variations/complications/delays: Yes	Additional information: <u>1st Progress report</u> - Booklet “Birds in Floodplains” <u>Interim Report</u> – 3 project site booklets Annex 14 - 5 site booklets Annex 15 – booklet “Floods. Floodplains”

Progress: 5 more site booklets (with information about 6 sites) have been printed during reporting period. They have been printed on environmentally friendly paper produced in Latvia, in full colour. Thematic booklet “Floods. Floodplains” have also been printed, in 7000 copies. Small changes have been made to number of copies and thematic focus of the booklets, they were communicated to EC in Interim Report and following correspondence and approved with letter DG ENV/D1/SL/AG D(2007) 3109 on 20.02.2007.

To summarize the status of printing booklets, please see the table below.

No	Title of booklet	Year to be printed	Copies	Status
1.	Birds in Floodplains	2005	15000	Printed
2.	Sita and Pededze + Mugurve	2006	5000	Printed
3.	Dviete floodplain	2006	7000	Printed
4.	Uzava floodplain	2006	5000	Printed
5.	Burtnieki meadows + Vidusburtnieks	2006	7000	Printed
6.	Kalnciems meadows	2007	3000	Printed
7.	Floods. Floodplains	2007	7000	Printed
8.	Lielupe meadows	2007	5000	Printed
9.	Ruja meadows	2007	3000	Printed
10.	Seda	2007	5000	Printed
11.	Agri-environment	2008	12000	Planned
12.	Restoration of floodplains	2008	7000	Planned
13.	Svete floodplain	2008	5000	Planned
14.	Rakupe meadows	2008	3000	Planned
15.	Lake Durbe meadows	2008	3000	Planned
16.	Burga meadows	2008	3000	Planned
17.	Pededze floodplain	2008	5000	Planned
Booklets printed during reporting period are shaded in green			TOTAL:	100000

Site booklets contain information about Natura 2000, nature and historical values of the territory, management measures, LIFE Floodplain project, tourism information and a map. They are prepared, according visual identity guidelines elaborated by Nature Protection Board and North Vidzeme biosphere reserve. Booklets are distributed via local municipalities and tourism information centres. Booklets are available also on project home page www.ldf.lv.

Variations/complications/delays: We have combined 4 project sites in 2 booklets (see number 2 and 5 in table), this choice was logical, as sites are very near to each other. Thus, we are saving some funds and can use them to increase the number of topics covered by booklets (to have 17 booklets as planned, but covering additional topics such as flooding, agro-environment, and restoration of floodplains).

ACTION E.9	Publication of layman's report	
Time plan: II 2008	Variations/complications/delays: No	Additional information: No

Progress: Action has not begun yet, according to the time plan.

ACTION E.10	Closing event of the project	
Time plan: II 2008	Variations/complications/delays: No	Additional information: No

Progress: Action has not begun yet, according to the time plan.

F. Overall project operation

Overall project operation involves staff management, organisation of the Steering Group meetings and monitoring of the project performance. All these activities are proceeding well, described in detail in sections below.

1st Progress Report was submitted in October 2005; Interim Report with payment request was submitted in July 2006.

Project organigram is included in Chapter 2 of this Report.

ACTION F.1	Establishment and meetings of the Project Steering Group, monitoring of project performance	
Time plan: IV 2004 – I 2008	Variations/complications/delays: No	Additional information: <u>1st Progress Report</u> -1 st and 2 nd SG presentations <u>Interim Report</u> – 3 rd SG presentation Annex 1 – Pictures of the project activities Annex 16 – Presentation about project performance to the 4 rd and 5 th Steering Group meetings.

Progress: Project Steering Group consists of representatives from all project partner municipalities (usually majors or project liaison officers), Ministry of Environment, North Vidzeme Biosphere reserve, Nature Protection board, Latvian Ornithological society, Latvian Environmental Protection fund and UNDP/GEF project “Conservation of Biological Diversity in North Vidzeme Biosphere reserve”, in total 29 persons, excluding project staff.

4th Steering Group meeting took place on 15.09.2006. 5th Steering Group meeting took place on 26.04.2007. Please see the presentations to the meetings attached in Annex 16.

ACTION F.2	Initiation of the monitoring system on the effects achieved by management measures	
Time plan: I 2005 – II 2008	Variations/complications/delays: No	Additional information: <u>1st Progress Report</u> - Monitoring Report 2005 <u>Interim Report</u> - Monitoring report 2006 Annex 21 – Monitoring report 2007

Progress: The project regional coordinators and hired experts are undertaking monitoring every year (2 night counts of project target species per season, monitoring of vegetation cover and monitoring of effect of management measures) according to established scheme. This monitoring data was very useful also for preparation of management plans for project sites, action A.5. Monitoring report for first project seasons (2005 and 2006) was included in 1st Progress Report and Interim Report. Please see monitoring report for third project season attached in Annex 21 to this report.

As the main objective of the project is to prevent further decline of *Crex crex* and *Gallinago media* populations by restoring or improving conditions of their breeding habitats, we chose additional bird species as indicators changes, in whose density or presence/absence would

characterise processes going on in the Project areas due to project activities. To keep the programme cost effective, monitoring plots were established in the areas where restoration activities have been planned. As the main species targeted by the project are active at night, the other indicator species were also chosen among species that are active during the night. Presence of *Aquila pomarina* in Project areas was recorded on daily activities – mapping areas for restoration, mapping of baseline vegetation cover *etc.* Presence of Hermit beetle was detected using pellet items, which were collected in suitable broadleaf trees and identified by entomologists in close investigations that were done as part of management plan preparation. Location of trees with *Osmoderma eremita* was digitized using GPS device.

As in 2005 and 2006, in 2007 mapping of the indicator bird species was performed twice in each of the Project Areas. To obtain comparable data the bird counting routes were kept the same as in 2006. Mapping data were added to the ArcGIS geodatabase and digitally stored as a point layer together with the mapping data of the previous year. The first mapping count in 2007 took place between May 14 and May 31 while the second mapping count – between June 1 and July 1. Mapping data are digitally stored as a point layer in an ArcGIS geodatabase.

We have also established vegetation monitoring plots in areas where project action C.2 (Shrub root destruction) is taking place in project sites.

ACTION F.3		Administration of the project	
Time plan: IV 2004 – II 2008	Variations/complications/delays: No	Additional information: <u>1st Progress Report and Interim Report</u> - Partner agreements Annex 17 – Public speaking training (in Latvian) Annex 20 – List of publications	

Progress: Action is proceeding as planned.

The LIFE unit and External monitoring team visited project on 05.07.2006, with site visit to project site “Sita and Pededze floodplain”.

All municipalities have hired project liaison officers, their workload ranges depending on local situation (number of landowners, number of project sites in municipality *etc.*). They are preparing monthly financial reports to the Latvian Fund for Nature and assisting to project staff in communication with local landowners, and providing all necessary local information.

Internal project meetings are taking place on regular basis; they took place on 03.07.2006, 18.12.2006 and 10.04.2007.

Project staff participated in LIFE Platform meeting on 19.10.2007 where current project technical implementation and financial reporting problems were discussed.

Additional expert meeting on management of river banks took place on 18.07.2007; we discussed habitat restoration in floodplains from viewpoints of plant and bird conservation priorities. The meeting was attended by 10 experts – ornithologists and botanists and project staff.

After first year, dealing with public hearings of management plans, it was recognised that there is a need for additional training for project staff and management plan experts on public speaking. This need was communicated during EC mission and in Interim Report and accepted

by the EC (letter DG ENV/E4/SL/nb D(2006) 16847 on 24.08.2006). Public speaking training for project staff and experts took place in 5-6 October 2006. The training provided many useful tools for daily communication with landowners and for presentation techniques. All the participants of the training (project staff and management plan editors) were instructed to prepare and present the presentation that is dealing with any of the aspects important for project. These presentations were later analysed, in the light of different techniques and skills of participants. Many useful recommendations and tools for future work within the project were provided during this training. The program of the training please see attached in Annex 17.

Due to recognised problems with heavy workload of the project staff we asked for permission to organise the time management training, in order to help project staff to organise tasks better and facilitate more efficient implementation of the project. The permission for training was granted on 20.02.2007 with letter DG ENV/D1/SL/AG D(2007) 3109. Ironically, we have not yet organised that training, due to lack of time.

1-2.08.2007 and 11-12.09.2007 – project manager and regional coordinator Ainars Aunins meeting with representatives of Nigula NR and Karula NP (Estonia) and discussing conservation aspects of one of the project target species Great Snipe, planning future activities that should be undertaken to follow up on project actions.

Regional reform of municipalities is still taking place in Latvia. First Additional Clause to the Project (24.05.2006) was introduced as project partner Pilskalne municipality was replaced by Ilukste Regional Council (including also Pilskalne municipality). In addition to these changes, 3 more partners have changed their status since:

- Valgunde municipality has become Valgunde regional Council
- Dviete municipality has joined Ilukste regional Council
- Vecate municipality has joined Burtnieki regional Council

We will submit the request for modifications not later than 3 months before the end of the project, according Article 13 of the Standard Administrative Provisions.

ACTION F.4	Audit of the project	
Time plan: I-II 2008	Variations/complications/delays: No	Additional information: No

Progress: Action has not begun yet, according to the time plan.

4. PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

Project is rather complicated, with 22 municipality partners and 3 institutional partners. Nevertheless, the complexity of the project is inevitable, as it includes 15 Natura 2000 sites all over Latvia. Therefore, project staff is traveling a lot to ensure successful implementation of the project. The main challenge to the project is to ensure successful integration of municipality partners and farmers in the project and their ownership of the project. To stimulate that, project staff, in particular project manager and public awareness coordinator are putting much effort in communication with municipalities – via liaison officers and directly with municipality leaders. Project regional coordinators are ensuring daily communication with landowners and site managers.

There are no major difficulties with implementation of the project activities recognized at this stage of the project. Few of the actions, namely A.7, E.4 and habitat restoration activities have been slightly delayed, for different reasons, described in Progress sections of respective activities.

We do not expect that prolongation of the project would be necessary. **The only substantial changes foreseen are those related to changes of the legal status of the project partner municipalities due to regional reform.** As described in description of action F.3, we will submit the request for above mentioned modifications not later than 3 months before the end of the project, according Article 13 of the Standard Administrative Provisions.

5. FINANCIAL ISSUES

5.1. Summary table of project costs

Cost category	Total cost according to the Commission's decision	Total costs incurred from the start date to 30.09.2007	% of total planned
1. Personnel	629652	530776	84,30
2. Travel	131058	88868	67,81
3. External assistance	508360	327971	64,52
4. Durable goods	5800	12482	215,21
5. Land purchase/lease	0	0	-
6. Consumable material	146730	35209	24,00
7. Other costs	75960	10109	13,31
8. Overheads	102806	70379	68,46
TOTAL	1600366	1075794	67,22

6. PLANNED PROJECT PROGRESS

During remaining 9 months we plan to finalize the habitat restoration works (C actions) - check the quality of restored areas and make the final comments.

Within action A.4, if such maps will become available, we will consider the option to purchase the spring 2008 aerial photos of project sites, within the planned budget of the action. This information would help us largely to evaluate and demonstrate the overall effect and scale of habitat restoration activities done by project for Final Report.

3 regional training seminars for farmers (A.7) will take place early 2008, with detailed information about agri-environmental schemes under Rural Development Programme and floodplain management methods.

We will follow up on implementation of our recommendations for improvements in legislation (A.8) and provide detailed account on this in Final Report.

Public information activities (stands E.3, booklets E.8) will be continued, remaining information stands prepared and set up and booklets published and distributed.

Final conclusions on monitoring (F2) will be prepared and incorporated in Grassland management handbook (E.6) that will be presented during the seminar for grassland managers (E.4) in February 2008.

We will organize project closing event (E.10) and prepare the layman's report (E.9) during the last quarter of the project, as planned.

LIST OF ANNEXES

- Annex 1 – Pictures of project activities and project sites
- Annex 2 – English summaries of management plans prepared in 2006/2007 (A.5)
- Annex 3 – Report from habitat restoration event in Pilssala (C.1)
- Annex 4 – Report from seminars “Economic development alternatives in Natura 2000 sites – tourism” (A.7)
- Annex 5 – Letters on recommendations from MOE and MOA (A.8)
- Annex 6 – Printouts of the latest news posted on website (E.2)
- Annex 7 – Study Tour report – Finland (E.5)
- Annex 8 – Study Tour report – Sweden (E.5)
- Annex 9 – Report from Green Week (E.5)
- Annex 10 – Report from international conference "Monitoring the effectiveness of Nature conservation" (E.5)
- Annex 11 – Report from international conference “Sustainable agriculture, water management supported by LIFE in Natura 2000 sites across Europe” (E.5)
- Annex 12 – Report from IALE World Congress “25 years Landscape Ecology: Scientific Principles in Practice” (E.5)
- Annex 13 – Summary management plans (E.7)
- Annex 14 – Site booklets (E.8)
- Annex 15 – Booklet “Floods. Floodplains” (E.8)
- Annex 16 - Presentations to the 4th and 5th Steering Group meetings (F.1)
- Annex 17 – Program of public speaking training (F.3)
- Annex 18 – Maps of project activities
- Annex 19 – CD with site management plans (in Latvian) (A.5)
- Annex 20 – List of articles in media and public events (E, F.3) in Latvian
- Annex 21 - Monitoring report 2007 (F.2)
- Annex 22 – Project posters (E.5)