Changing a floodplain grassland from intensive to extensive agricultural management

Waddensea Estuary Nature and Environment Improvement Project (WEP)

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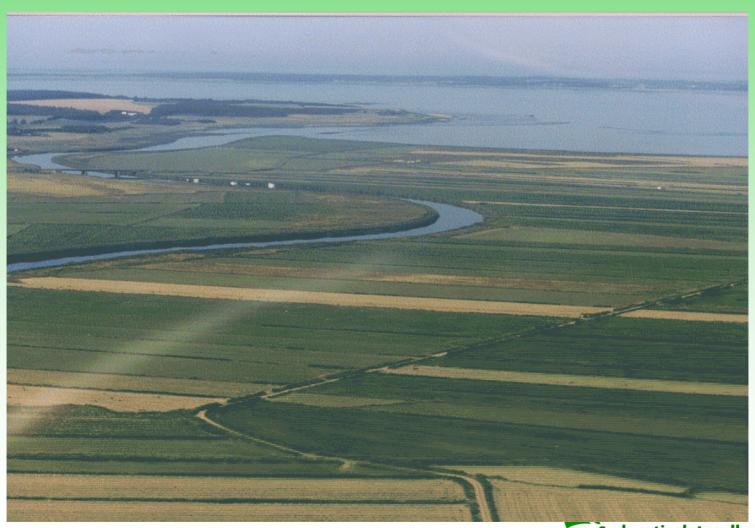


Description of the procect area

- Unigue estuary in the entire Waddensea area
- Designated as EEC Bird Protetction Area, EEC Habitat Area, Ramsar Area and protected by the Danish Nature Protection Act.
- Until the 1950s, The area was important for a big number og birds and bird species.
- Gradually more efficient draining and intensification og agricultural management methods has resulted in a decline og nature values
- 2.700 hectare fresh and salt meadows
- Before the project there was approx. 400 private land owners



Varde River Valley and Ho Bugt



Sydvestjysk Landboforening

Implementation

- The WEP is based on voluntary participation from the land owners
- Land consolidation has been used to secure the necessary support from the land owners
- Agri-environment agreements with the farmers
 - Establishment og wetlands in average 400 € per hectare per year during 20 years
- Restoring of the hydrological dynamics
- The overall project management is delegated to a steering committee constituted by the local county;
 Danish Ministry of Food and Agriculture; Ministry og the Envirenment; local Farmers Union.

stivsk Landboforening

Agri-environmental agreements in the area 1

- Extensify agricultural management methods:
 - no use of fertilizers
 - No use og pesticides
 - No re-laying of fields
 - Only grazing with ruminants and horses
 - Max. 0,8 LU per hectare out to graze
 - No cutting before 25 june
 - Agricultural use every year



Agri-environmental agreements in the area 2

- Restore the hydrological dynamics in the project area:
 - 280 sluice gates have been established
 - 12 riffles have been established
 - Approx. 600 artificial ditches have been closed
- The result is one water level in may to october, where the farmers must use the area for agricultural purpose, and another water level from october to may in favorite for resting birds and other meadow organisms.



One out of twelve riffles





One out of 280 sluice gates





Why were the farmers interested in the project?

- The idea was presented by the chairman for their own local farmers union
- From the beginning the farmers was involved in the discussions with the authorities about conditions and compensations
- In the meetings with the farmers about land consolidation and project development in local areas representatives from the farmers union were active.
- The application paper was carried out by the representative from the farmeres union in "the farmers kitchen"
- The economic compensation was attractive compared to the alternatives
- The farmers union was one of the actors. In the project periode there will be a short distance between farmer and the authorities.



Environmental advantages of the project

- Agricultural management methods are extensifyed in more than 90 % of the project area. 2.500 hectars
- In the same parts the water level has been raised
- The habitat diversity are getting better (the corncrake is back)
- The leaching of nitrogen compounds to the aquatic environment have been reduced



Corn-crake





Advantages for the farmers

- The economic result is stable and good in a period with declining prises on products
- Grazing is more widespreed like back in the 60's.
 Managing of small fields between ditches is not for big machines in the modern danish agriculture.
- Hey from the meadows is an attractive product, especially for ecological cattle, sheep and horses.
- Branding. "Ho Bugt" and "Varde Ådal" is used in marketing of meat and cheese.



Disanvatages for the farmers

- There is a disconnection between the idea of a high water level in the area and the requirement of agricultural use every year.
- If an area is dominated by other species than grasses, the farmer can't get the 400 € pr. year.
- What happens after 20 years with the project?



Conclusions

- More than 90 % of the area is within the project althouh it's voluntary for the farmers
- There is a conflict between the project idea of high water level and the compensation depending on agritural use every year and flora dominated by grasses.
- A good dialogue between the farmers and the authorithes canalized through the farmers organisation.
- There is progress in the diversity of flora and fauna in the project area.

