

Restoration of brackish ecosystems in Westzaan polder

Official title

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Background

In the past, the Westzaan Nature 2000 site was an area of brackish waters due to the regular intake of salt water. However, since the closure of the Zuider Zee in 1932 by the Afsluitdijk between Friesland and Noord-Holland, freshwater encroached, threatening the site's ecological values. Westzaan is one of the few areas where a former brackish peat meadow habitat can be regenerated. The present fresh water conditions are a threat for brackish vegetation habitat types. Furthermore in fresh water conditions the vegetation develops in such a way that open spaces become scarce, which could become a threat to root role (*Microtus oeconomus*).

With the change from brackish to fresh water, the degradation of peat takes place at large scale. The resulting particles lead to turbidity of the water, reducing the growth of water plants. This is a threat for fishes as the bitterling (*Rhodeus sericeus subsp. amarus*) and spined loach (*Cobitis taenia*). Polder Westzaan is a pSCI that includes Annex I Habitats Directive types such as Atlantic salt meadows, Northern Atlantic wet heathlands, hydrophilous tall herb fringe communities of plains, and transition mires and quaking bogs.

Objectives

The aim of the project is to restore the brackish ecosystems in the Westzaan polder by reintroducing salt water, while at the same time safeguarding other functions, such as agriculture and leisure. The project will furthermore prepare the way for large-scale dredging works and nature development works which will fully utilise the brackish conditions. This includes the Habitat directive Annex I habitat types: Atlantic salt meadows, Northern Atlantic wet heathlands, hydrophilous tall herb fringe communities of plains and transition mires and quaking bogs. The directly targeted Habitats directive Annex II species are: *Microtus oeconomus subsp. arenicola*, *Myotis dasycneme*, *Cobitis taenia* and *Rhodeus sericeus*

LIFE06 NAT/NL/000076
Verbrakking Westzaan



Beneficiary:

Type of beneficiary

National authority

Name of beneficiary

Staatbosbeheer

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Name of contact person

Jaap Van Groeningen

Duration of project:

48 months (Sept 2006 – Aug 2010)

Total budget in euro:

3,406,241

EC contribution in euro with %:

953,747 (28 %)

subsp. amarus. The project will create a saltwater inlet in the North Sea Canal in the south of the area, from where a sufficient quantity of water with a suitable salt content can be siphoned across the dyke, from a depth of 9 metres. The water will be fed to the project area through an underground pipe into the surface water, ultimately reaching the whole of the most northerly point of the Westzaan polder (the Guisveld). In areas where farmers are still grazing cattle, fresh and salt water will be kept separated; provisions will also be taken for the passage of recreational vessels. The project includes management and monitoring activities and communication activities.