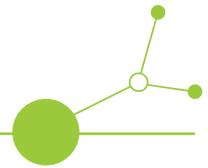


Joint peer-review

Miramare and Coast of Trieste Biosphere Reserve: Karst dry grassland restoration - Pian del Grisa



December 2025

ReCo pilot region Miramare and Coast of Trieste Biosphere Reserve:
Report from the peer review visit 11. - 12. September 2025



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Disclaimer

This document was developed as a part of the project *ReCo - Restoring degraded eco-systems along the Green Belt to improve and enhance biodiversity and ecological connectivity*, supported by the Interreg Central Europe Programme with co-financing from the European Regional Development Fund. Responsibility for the content lies solely with the ReCo project consortium and can in no case be treated as a reflection of the position of the European Union.



1. Agenda and participants

Agenda 11 Sep 2025 - day 1

Time	Place	Agenda item
9.15 - 11.00	Palazzolo dello Stella	Visit to regional nurseries of Villa Volpares
12.00 - 13.00	Ceroglie	Visit to Antonič's farm
14.30 - 16.30	Malchina	Roundtable with stakeholders (Comunella di Contovello, GAL Carso, UNITS, local producers, person in charge of mowing)
17.00 - 18.30	Pian del Grisa	On-site inspection with the monitoring team (M. Paparot, E. Melotti, A. Petrarca, D. Scridel)

Agenda 12 Sep 2025 - day 2

Time	Place	Agenda item
9.00 - 12.00	AMP Miramare - WWF Office	Discussion of findings and conclusions

Participants

Name	Organisation, role in the Project	Role in the peer review
Jörg Schmiedel	BUND Naturschutz in Bayern, LP	Team leader
Hana Skokanová	Landscape Research Institute, PP 9	Note taker
Marek Havlíček	Landscape Research Institute, PP 9	Photographer
Ondrej Volf	Ametyst, PP 4	Photographer
Tomáš Slach	Landscape Research Institute, PP 9	Drone manager
Agnes Groß	Vienna University, PP 8	Peer review team
Bojana Lipej	DOPPS, PP 3	Peer review team
Manuela Londoño Jiménez	Vienna University, PP 8	Peer review team
Lenka Malíková	Ministry of Environment, PP 12	Peer review team
Josef Svoboda	Landscape Research Institute, PP 9	Peer review team
Eva Volfová	Ametyst, PP 4	Peer review team
Alessio Flego	WWF Italy, PP 13	Action implementation team
Lisa Peratoner	WWF Italy, PP 13	Action implementation team
Maurizio Spoto	WWF Italy, PP 13	Action implementation team
Elena Talarico	WWF Italy, PP 13	Action implementation team
Giovanna Caputo	WWF Italy, PP 13	Action implementation team
Marco Paparot	WWF Italy, PP 13	Biodiversity monitoring team
Annamaria Petrarca	WWF Italy, PP 13	Biodiversity monitoring team

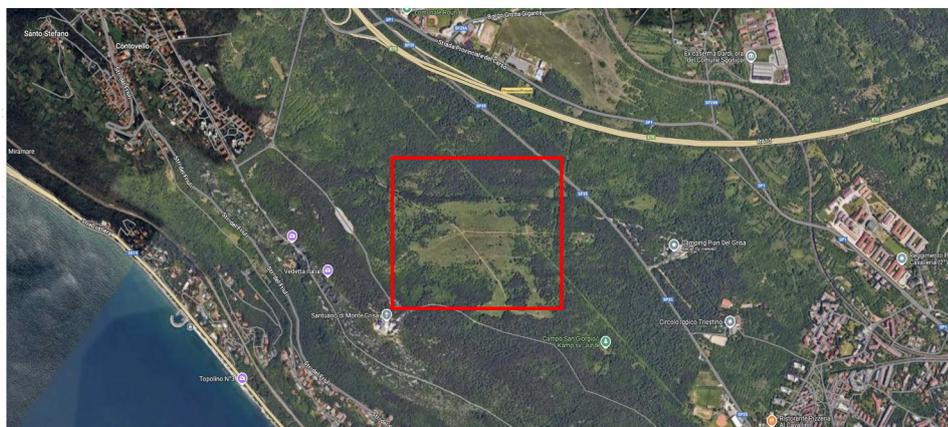


Eugenio Melotti	WWF Italy, PP 13	Biodiversity monitoring team
Davide Scridel	WWF Italy, PP 13	Biodiversity monitoring team
Aleš Pernarčič	GAL Carso - Las Kras	Stakeholder (representative of the local action group GAL)
Franc Fabec	Azienda Agricola Fabec	Stakeholder (local farmer)
Marco Valecic	Regione Autonoma FVG, Servizio Biodiversità	Stakeholder (representative of the Region FVG)
Miris Castello	Università degli Studi di Trieste - UNITS	Stakeholder (University, Assistant professor in plant ecology)
Andrej Stoka	Azienda Agricola Antonič	Stakeholder (local farmer)
Matjaž Rustja	Comunella di Contovello - Jus Kontovel	Stakeholder (president of the Contovello Communal Land)
Franco Regent	Comunella di Contovello - Jus Kontovel	Stakeholder (person in charge of mowing in Pian del Grisa)

2. Basic information about the visited Action

Name of the Action	Karst dry grassland restoration - Pian del Grisa
Implementation period	19.11.2024 - 28.02.2026
Responsible Project partner	WWF Italy, PP 13
Total budget	199.810,00
Location	City of Trieste: Pian del Grisa (45° 41'48.3"N 13° 45'29.0"E)

Map



Target species/habitats

The target habitat is the dry grassland habitat, below its main features:

- Semi-natural origin: one of the most distinctive semi-natural habitats of the Karst territory, shaped over centuries by human-environment interaction.



- Traditional land use: Formed through historical practices such as grazing, mowing, and selective woodland clearing.
- Landscape characteristics: wind-swept dry grasslands, sparse and low-growing vegetation, limestone bedrock with shallow and primitive soils, frequent rocky outcrops and abundant surface stones.
- Vegetation resilience: adapted to harsh abiotic conditions, trampling, and livestock grazing, resulting in a patchy and heterogeneous plant cover.
- Ecological richness: this discontinuous vegetation structure supports exceptionally high floral and faunal biodiversity. Over 100 plant species (with about 10 protected under EU directives), 40 bird species, 120 butterfly species, 12 ground beetle species (*Carabidae*) were recorded in Pian del Grisa, but the actual species numbers may be even higher.

Background

The pilot site is situated roughly 8 kilometers northwest of Trieste, on the Karst plateau. Although geographically close to the Adriatic Sea, the area lies at an elevation of approximately 300 meters. Historically, this terrain consisted of dry grasslands primarily used for pastoral purposes. Human activity—mainly grazing and trampling by sheep and goats, along with regular mowing—shaped the landscape over time, fostering the development of a distinctive ecosystem. In the past five decades, the decline of traditional pastoral practices has led to a rapid encroachment of woody vegetation. Two pioneer species in particular—the smoke tree (*Cotinus coggygria*) and the black pine (*Pinus nigra*)—have become increasingly dominant. As a result, the extent of this unique grassland ecosystem is shrinking, triggering a broader reduction in biodiversity across the region. In particular, habitat fragmentation has reduced connectivity between dry grassland patches, hindering species movement and genetic dispersal. As a result, the Karst grassland now survives only in a few residual nuclei, extremely limited in size and with severely compromised ecological functionality. Furthermore, processes such as urbanization, the construction of infrastructure networks, the arrival of invasive alien species, and increasing recreational use of the area (sometimes even with unleashed dogs) have further contributed to territorial fragmentation and endangered existing ecological balances. Among the observed trends, the most significant is the decline in floristic, entomological, and avifaunal diversity associated with grasslands, with a corresponding increase in woodland species at the expense of those typical of heathland environments. Specifically regarding birdlife, many species characteristic of open or semi-open areas—such as *Alauda arvensis* and *Anthus campestris*—are now in an unfavorable conservation status or already extinct, while at least nine species no longer nest in the Karst heathlands.

Objectives

The general objective is to expand and reconnect the Karst dry grassland habitat by reversing decades of forest encroachment due to land-use abandonment and to preserve the region's dry grassland biodiversity and its role as a corridor for species, while enhancing climate resilience (open grasslands are less fire-prone than dense brush). The technical interventions encompass the removal of black pine trees and the cutting and eradication of *Cotinus coggygria* shrubs. Seasonal seed collection is carried out in both autumn and spring, followed by sowing in controlled nursery conditions. Experimental plots are then prepared to facilitate the transplantation of nursery-grown specimens into the field combined with the sowing of native species. Monitoring activities are conducted regularly, focusing on bird and lepidopteran populations, the presence and condition of target plant species, and the interactions between butterflies and flowering plants. Final evaluations are performed to assess the vitality and establishment success of the transplanted vegetation. Engagement and participation of local stakeholders (such as landowners,



communities, farmers, associations, local authorities and the general public) is fostered, raising awareness and promoting both the long-term maintenance of open grassland and shared responsibility for its management. Technical and methodological tools are provided to facilitate the adoption and implementation of interventions, including guidelines for the restoration and management of grassland areas and an operational method including a timeline, implementation phases, and progress monitoring.

Expected results

- Improvement and restoration of the degraded dry grassland ecosystem condition in Pian del Grisa, on an area of about 2 hectares.
- Monitoring of biodiversity recovery through periodic surveys (that track the reappearance of plant and animal species at the restored site, before, during and after the intervention).
- Compilation of a detailed list of observed species, with emphasis on endangered and ecologically significant ones, reviewed in collaboration with scientific and conservation professionals.
- Presentation of the results to local stakeholders, students, and the general public through outreach events.
- Development of identification cards and booklets based on the species to support public participation and raise awareness.
- Development and installation of two panels depicting local biodiversity in Pian del Grisa.
- Documentation and recording of the restoration intervention, including photographic evidence at different stages.
- Drafting of guidelines on the dry grassland restoration process and a long-term management plan for the dry grassland habitat.
- Promoting the adoption of a long-term management plan at the conclusion of the project activities, in cooperation with local stakeholders.

Measures implemented

A vegetation-clearing operation was conducted over 2 hectares of dry grassland affected by encroachment, targeting the removal of invasive woody species – most notably the fire-prone black pine (*Pinus nigra*) and the aggressive shrub *Cotinus coggygria* – to restore the openness of the landscape. To prevent soil exposure following shrub eradication, and to limit the establishment of invasive alien species such as *Ailanthus altissima* and *Senecio inaequidens*, a restoration program was implemented in collaboration with the regional forest nursery of Friuli-Venezia Giulia. This program involves three key steps: seasonal collection of seeds from native species, cultivation of seedlings in the nursery, and (still to be done) reintroduction into the grassland through transplanting combined with direct sowing. A coordinated botanical and faunal monitoring effort—focusing on birds, carabid beetles, and butterflies—is being carried out throughout all phases of the intervention (before, during, and after), enabling comparisons between open grassland and forest-dominated areas and providing data on habitat evolution and species recolonization. To foster community engagement and awareness, a series of public meetings, fieldwork sessions, and citizen science initiatives were organized, also involving schools and local residents in monitoring activities. Additionally, species identification cards for native flora and fauna were produced, and two interpretive panels on the biodiversity of Pian del Grisa are to be installed to support educational outreach and raise awareness among the local population and hikers about the importance of conserving this semi-natural habitat.



Stage of implementation at the time of the peer review
<p>The implementation is still in progress. The actions taken so far are listed below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The seedlings of seven native species were sowed and are now growing in the nursery. • The operations to cut down the black pine trees and the smoke tree shrubs have been completed and the wood chips have been removed from the pilot area. • A mulcher has been used to uproot the smoke tree from the pilot area. • Seven experimental plots for the transplant of native species have been prepared. • The process of obtaining landscape authorization for the installation of the two panels on biodiversity is ongoing. • The joint monitoring activities on flora, birdlife, butterflies, and carabids are continuing in and around the pilot area. • Many dissemination and educational events are being carried out to rise awareness and local population engagement (workshops, public events, schools involvement, etc.) together with a communication program through social media and local press.

3. Questionnaire for the Action implementation team

Did you cooperate with external experts during the measures planning?	Yes	A dialogue was held with professors from the University of Trieste, the Natural History Museum of Trieste and the reference figures of the biodiversity and forest management services of the Friuli-Venezia Giulia Region.
Additional comment of the Action implementation team		
Additional comment of the peer review team		
<p>The peer review visit revealed an excellent inclusion of various external experts and WWF, which was partly founded on long existing cooperation and an obvious willingness to cooperate. The cooperation yielded very good basic data which allowed targeted planning of the measures on a scientifically sound basis.</p>		

3.1. Initial and preparation phase

Question	Y/N/ N/A	Comment
Restoration planning and preparation		
Did you carry out the baseline survey during the restoration planning?	Yes	The baseline surveys were carried out by WWF in collaboration with the FVG Region services and the



Question	Y/N/ N/A	Comment
		president of the Contovello Communal Land. They focused on identifying the most suitable intervention area, taking into account vegetation density, ease of access, ecological continuity with the intact dry grassland, and permits and authorizations.
Did you prepare a feasibility study?	Yes	An application form for the overall impact screening procedure before the start of the project was carried out by a forestry technician, receiving permission.
Did you identify any conflicts between different protection subjects?	No	
Do you have a technical documentation or management plan?	Yes	A technical report was drawn up by the forestry technician in charge of following the works, and it includes the territorial framework, the current state of the area, the organizational aspects and the details of the works to be carried out, the cadastral surfaces involved and a photographic documentation.
Did you cooperate with external experts during the measures planning?	Yes	The dialogue with professors from the University of Trieste, the Natural History Museum of Trieste and the reference figures of the biodiversity and forest management services of the Friuli-Venezia Giulia Region was crucial to establish the biodiversity targets and refine the operative measures.
Did you face problems in obtaining the necessary permits and approvals?	Yes	Difficulties emerged both in identifying a suitable area for the intervention according to current regulations (see answer below) and in the process of obtaining authorizations, particularly concerning cutting operations.
Did you face any legal barriers or conflicts with policies and official strategies?	Yes	A conflict emerged at the regional regulatory level, for the restoration of the grassland and the protection of the forest. Parcels were chosen where this conflict was not present because the forest area was less than 20%.
Stakeholder involvement (including the local community)		
Did you identify relevant stakeholders in advance?	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contovello Communal Land for ensuring the availability of land, promoting forms of participatory management of the agricultural and pastoral landscape, and facilitating direct community involvement. Circoscrizione Altipiano, district of the Municipality of Trieste, as a territorial link, acting as a bridge between citizens and local governments to facilitate communication, support information and awareness-raising efforts, and contribute to the gathering of



Question	Y/N/ N/A	Comment
		<p>administrative validation of interventions and public acceptance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friuli-Venezia Giulia Region, as primary institutional contact, responsible for regulatory coherence and coordination with regional environmental policies, to ensure the plan's technical validation, coordinate regulatory harmonization between sectors, and monitor alignment with regional and national strategies and regulations. • University of Trieste to share knowledge about ecological restoration and connectivity projects, ensuring high scientific value throughout the action. • GAL-Carso (Local Action Group-Carso) for sharing knowledge, best practices and lessons learnt from previously-conducted restoration projects. • Local producers (farmers, shepherds, herbalists, and other niche producers) to contribute to the active conservation of the habitat through concrete actions in the field and the promotion of biodiversity-compatible agro-pastoral practices for the middle and long-term maintenance. • Recreational users (guides, hikers, associations, schools, the general public, etc.) to foster environmental education, local awareness and respectful behaviours.
Did you inform and/or involve them during the preparation phase?	Yes	The Contovello Communal Land, the Friuli-Venezia Giulia Region and the local producers were the pillars of the preparation phase, to define the procedures, gather permissions, receive technical consulting, and evaluate practical feasibility of each operation.
Did you face any conflicts with stakeholders during the preparation phase?	No	
Communication and involvement general public		
Did you start communication with general public during the preparation phase?	Yes	Several posts were published on the Facebook page, a public meeting was held to describe and discuss the intervention, a press conference was held to promote and explain the action, and a public participation event was organized for the flora and fauna monitoring. Furthermore, two news items were published on the project website, and information was shared via newsletter to a mailing list of over 5000 subscribers.



3.2. Implementation phase

Question	Y/N/ N/A	Comment
Restoration measures implementation		
Have you implemented the restoration as foreseen (so far)?	Yes	There are no potential changes to suggest so far. Even though the information campaign has already been extensive, it could always be further strengthened (particularly regarding cutting operations) to reduce even more disinformation and misunderstandings, and of course raise awareness.
Have you faced any unexpected conditions (e.g., extreme weather, different situation on the site than expected, lack of workers...)?	No	
Do you cooperate/have you cooperated with external experts during the measures implementation (e.g., continuous monitoring, scientific studies, etc.)?	Yes	Flora and fauna monitoring activities are also conducted during the implementation phase by a dedicated team of experts. The cooperation with the FVG Region's technicians and experts is crucial for the growth of the seedlings of native species in the nursery and for the positioning and preparation of the transplantation plots.
Have you noticed any negative impact of the restoration measures during their implementation on species, habitats, people, economic values...?	Yes	Despite the information campaign carried out, some individuals did not understand the importance and scientific validity of the intervention and in particular of the logging operations, leaving negative comments under Facebook posts.
Stakeholder involvement (including the local community)		
Are you communicating with stakeholders and involving them in the Action's implementation?	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contovello Communal Land: almost daily updates on every activity carried out and for any specific request. • Friuli-Venezia Giulia Region: frequent updates regarding the progress of the action, the growth of the plants in the nursery, the coordinated planning of the next technical activities and invitation to participate as speakers in one public dissemination event. • Local producers: invitation to the public dissemination event, interviews to collect their actual needs to prepare the follow-up maintenance phase (especially for farmers).
Have you faced any conflicts with stakeholders?	No	



Question	Y/N/ N/A	Comment
Communication with general public		
Do you communicate with general public?	Yes	With Facebook posts (and answers to related questions or comments), newsletter, newspaper articles, one public event and one public monitoring-like activity.
Do you carry out public events?	Yes	One public event was held, presenting the action, its issues, challenges, expected results and monitoring activities.
Do you work with volunteers?	No	

3.3. After-implementation phase

Question	Y/N/ N/A	Comment
Restoration evaluation		
Have you carried out / do you plan monitoring surveys to assess the impact?	Yes	Flora and fauna monitoring activities will also be conducted after the implementation phase by a dedicated team of experts. The survival rate and vitality of the transplanted seedlings will also be evaluated by the FVG Region's experts.
Do you / will you cooperate with external experts in the assessment?	Yes	As above.
Stakeholder involvement (including the local community), communication with general public		
Are the stakeholders (going to be) involved in the after-implementation phase?	Yes	The Contovello Communal Land and the local farmers will be involved in order to adopt a long-term maintenance plan based on pastoral activities.
Will you continue to communicate with general public?	Yes	
Sustainability, replicability		
Have you taken measures / do you have plans how to assure sustainability of the Action's results?	Yes	The adoption of a long-term maintenance plan based on pastoral activities will ensure the sustainable management of the newly-restored habitat in Pian del Grisa. Additionally, the restoration guidelines to be issued and the already developed Local Restoration Plan will serve as a basis for the replication of the action in adjacent or near places with similar characteristics.
Is any further financing necessary and have you assured it?	Yes	Further financing is necessary to ensure sustainability and replicability of the Action. Fundraising already included the submission of the "Skills4Green" project to the Interreg Italy-Croatia Program, the outcome of



Question	Y/N/ N/A	Comment
		which will be known by December 31, 2025. If successful, the project will launch in September 2026, thus ensuring relative continuity with the ReCo project activities concluded in February 2026 in Pian del Grisa. Furthermore, starting in February 2026, based on the results of monitoring the effectiveness of mowing and deforestation interventions in containing smoke tree and invasive species, and the replanting of native species, the adoption of a long-term maintenance plan for the management of the Pian del Grisa grassland will establish itself the procedures and timelines for requesting specific fundings and/or the applicability of corporate actions for long-term management.
Is it possible to replicate the measures in different locations?	Yes	The measures can be replicated in adjacent, nearby or even more distant areas, provided that they have similar characteristics.
Do you have any replicability tools which can be shared?	Yes	The restoration guidelines to be issued and the already developed Local Restoration Plan will serve as a basis for the replication of the Action.
Do you disseminate the project results?	Yes	The results of the monitoring activities and the success of the overall Action will be disseminated after the project's ending.

3.4. Recommendations, lessons learnt

Lessons learnt during the preparation and implementation of the Action and recommendations for restoration projects
<p>At this stage of the project only a partial view can be shared. By the way, it was crucial to identify, involve, and maintain a dialogue with all stakeholders right from the preparation and very early stages of the project, in order to avoid any problems, technical issues or disagreements along the way. Furthermore, a combined and broad-spectrum monitoring program allows to evaluate the situation before, during and after the intervention, and to evaluate the success of the project. In the end, communication with the general public is essential to raise awareness and to avoid or reduce misinformation when it comes to socially sensitive and easily misunderstood issues such as tree felling.</p>

4. Field visit

<p>The restoration site at Pian del Grisa was visited. Bushes, mainly <i>Cotinus coggygria</i>, had been cleared from the area, with the herbaceous vegetation remaining and even after such a short time visibly recovering. The patches with former dense bush growth were largely still bare of vegetation, and some sprouts of <i>Cotinus</i> from remaining rootstocks could be observed, which were to be cleared at a later stage – a completely normal development after such an action and no sign of any failure or problematic turn.</p>



The nursery-reared young plants were scheduled to be planted in late October/early November, just before the winter rains, and were thus not established in-situ yet.

The state of the landscape showed a great improvement for the grassy Karst habitats and a professional realization of the restoration measures, which is especially remarkable considering the very limited time available for their planning and implementation. Plans are to involve local communities to help clean the area in future. An agreement with local farmers to graze the area and thus keep it open and revive former land use is planned.

Monitoring of birds, bats, plants, carabids and butterflies is ongoing and was presented in good detail, with some example species special for the restored area being discussed. So far mainly forest species were recorded, which is not surprising considering the former shrubland character of the area until the bushes were removed; grassland species were in minority but are expected to increase. The monitoring concept was regarded very professional and scientifically sound by the peer review team, proving excellent expertise in its design and execution. The monitoring can illustrate the changes in habitats and species composition that are the result of the restoration measure, with of course final assessments only being possible in a few years ahead. Results from the monitoring are being provided in openly available databases: iNaturalist and for birds the ornithological database ornitho.it. The monitoring is planned to be continued after the end of the ReCo project, butterflies being e.g. part of a national project.

5. Meetings with stakeholders

Name	Marco Valecic
Organisation/institution	Regione FVG: Regional nurseries of Villa Volpares
Relation to the Action	Cultivation and rearing of rare indigenous plant species from Pian del Grisa
Outcomes of the meeting	
<p>The nursery is producing the plants for in-situ establishment on Pian del Grisa. The plants were raised from wild collected local seeds in order to ensure complete genetic compatibility with the indigenous flora. The peer review had a thorough look at the premises of the nurseries including both the outside cultivation areas and the greenhouses.</p> <p>The nursery site was formerly a public farm and converted to a nursery specializing on nature conservation needs 20 years ago. At first, mainly wetland species were cultivated and raised, with the dry grassland flora joining six years ago. The produced plants are being used to recolonize natural and restored areas. In wetland areas this has proved to be successful, in dry grasslands there have however been complications. The peer review team brought up proposals for improving success with dryland species, e.g. regarding substrate (less organic, preferably from the natural habitat) and pot size (higher). These proposals were openly taken up by nursery personnel.</p> <p>For Miramare, 7 species – some common, some rare – are propagated, with 50 individual plants planned to be transplanted to the Pian del Grisa restoration site later in the year. All plants looked healthy and fit for in-situ introduction.</p> <p>An enlargement of the nursery is planned and cooperation with Carsiana Botanical Garden is being established for supporting dryland species propagation. For some species that are difficult to germinate, a cooperation with Udine University has been set up.</p>	

Name	Andrej Stoka
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Organisation/institution	Antonič's farm
Relation to the Action	Sustainable farming for landscape management and restoration; sheep grazing on Pian del Grisa
Outcomes of the meeting	
<p>Antonič's is a family-run farm with 250 sheep of the special and endangered local breed. Wool is of rather poor quality, they only yield a small amount of milk (but high quality), and therefore this breed is rarely used anymore. It is however well adapted to local habitats and excellently suited for landscape management with a nature conservation focus. One of the goals of all work is to protect the biodiversity of the Karst region.</p> <p>The sheep are roaming freely, without fences, on the grazing grounds and are being brought there each morning by a shepherd from March till December. They are being milked twice a day for 8 months, once a day for 2 months. Dogs and also jackals are a recurring problem. The farm cooperates with a start-up in Udine where they sell the wool, but it is also sold to a company in Maribor. Shearing the sheep takes place twice per year in spring and autumn, three people are hired for this.</p> <p>All grazing is performed in a rotational regime with the total grazed area encompassing 100 ha. 1 ha of a typical meadow can only sustain 7 sheep. 50 sheep are to be used for grazing the Pian del Grisa pilot area. These will, at least at first, be sheep with a worse quality because the farmer doesn't know what potential problems can occur at that site (e.g. with dogs from visitors).</p>	

	Franc Fabec
Organisation/institution	Osmiza Fabec
Relation to the Action	Marketing of local sustainable produce from small agricultural enterprises; raising awareness for sustainable small-scale farming
Outcomes of the meeting	
<p>Osmizas are traditional small bars or basic restaurants in small villages that serve local produce especially to day trippers. They are an option for direct/local marketing for small family farms in the area. Today, the palette of served food has widened, but Osmiza Fabec is still keeping much of the tradition. Customers originate largely from Trieste, i.e. they are visitors going for outings in the surrounding landscape.</p> <p>Osmiza Fabec was the location of the stakeholder round table, which involved a variety of local stakeholders representing various functions and professions.</p>	

1	Name	Matjaž Rustja
	Organisation/institution	Comunella di Contovello
	Relation to the Action	Local commune, supporting nature restoration by e.g. providing suitable land
2	Name	Aleš Pernarcic
	Organisation/institution	GAL Carso
	Relation to the Action	Landscape protection and management initiative
3	Name	Miris Castello
	Organisation/institution	Università degli Studi di Trieste (UNITS)



	Relation to the Action	Provision of scientific advice and involvement in monitoring
4	Name	Franc Fabec
	Organisation/institution	Osmiza Fabec
	Relation to the Action	Marketing local small farm products sourced from animals in landscape management
5	Name	Franco Regent
	Organisation/institution	Comunella di Contovello
	Relation to the Action	Person in charge of mowing

Outcomes of the meeting

The round table with stakeholders offered the opportunity for an intense discussion between the peer review team and all local stakeholders present. Each stakeholder was given the opportunity to present their views and perspectives in an opening statement. It became clear that there is strong support for the ReCo pilot action in Pian del Grisa. Nonetheless, most statements emphasized problems, e.g. the difficult economic situation of small farms, especially if they wish to respect nature. EU agricultural politics and policies were seen critical as mainly large and industrialized farms are profiting and for small farms the regulations and reporting obligations are too much. It was voiced that farmers in the Karst have always respected nature and that their main problem is not the low productivity of the land, but rather the multitude of of bans and requirements which are regularly keeping small farmers from receiving any subsidies at all.

Spreading of forest was seen as another problem. Per definition, a forest is present if woody vegetation is developed for 20 years in any form (even very thin sticks); it is then legally very difficult to clear it. Grazing in forests – even in cases where it is legal – is not economically feasible.

A change of regulations at least on the regional level was demanded (which of course is largely impossible under the EU’s agricultural policy). Developing a management plan for the whole region was suggested (as it was done in Slovenia) and based on this the small farmers could possibly be better heard.

6. Evaluation of the Action

6.1. Assessment of procedures

Availability of documentation
All necessary documents were available to the peer review team.
Preparation and implementation of restoration measures
The restoration measures have been planned and implemented in a professional way. As implementation was still ongoing at the time of the visit, a final judgment was not possible, but the proposed plans for the final implementation measures until February 2026 (and also beyond) were convincing and of high scientific quality.
Stakeholder involvement
Stakeholder involvement can be regarded as very good. The diversity of stakeholders included and involved in the work is commendable and much higher than commonly practiced in other restorations. It



is also foreseeable that good cooperation will continue after the end of the ReCo project, as perspectives for constant involvement in landscape management have been prepared.
Communication with general public
<p>Communication with the public had to deal with some opposition to the shrub and tree removal on the Pian del Grisa site. This occurred despite prior public information, which is normal, as even good communication will never reach everyone. The necessity of the shrub removal was well explained and thus widely accepted.</p> <p>Further public relations activities were in planning at the time of the visit, like an information board at the Pian del Grisa site providing information on the restored landscape. It was obvious to the peer review team that WWF has great experience in public communication and information and is constantly working on this topic e.g. with the BioMa information center which is focusing on the marine habitats.</p>
Sustainability, continuation
It is obvious that benefits of the restoration will be long lasting. Future management of the restored site has already been planned in detail, with responsible persons/companies identified and stakeholders and possible supporters involved. There is no indication that any of the achieved restoration results will not fully persist well beyond project lifetime.
Replication and dissemination
Various Karst restoration activities have been realized in the past in the region, although most extensively in neighboring Slovenia. The successful restoration on Pian del Grisa can serve as a blueprint for further activities in Italy. The results are well visible to the public as the site lies just adjacent to a core visited area and the professional implementation team at WWF will still be available beyond ReCo project lifetime for advice.

6.2. Environmental impact

Assess the (anticipated) impact of the implemented measures on the target species/habitats
As the major restoration activity, the cutting of shrubs and trees, had just been performed at the time of visit it was not yet possible for the peer review team to provide a final assessment. However, all experts agreed that the measure can be expected to be highly successful, as it has been executed using state of the art practices and knowledge. The peer review team anticipates the rare grassland species of the Karst to profit considerably, with probably even some species reappearing on the site that were not present before the restoration. The planned monitoring will provide good information on all developments in future.
How does the Action contribute to the ecological connectivity along the EGB?
The remaining patches of Karst grassland are often isolated and movement between them is frequently difficult to impossible for some of their rare and specialized plant and animal species. The restored site provides an additional stepping stone and base for inter-grassland movements and thus has a high importance as a connecting element in the landscape.
How does the Action contribute to increasing biodiversity?
The rare and specialized flora and fauna of the Karst will hugely benefit from the restoration. The monitoring shows that only few Karst grassland species occurred prior to the restoration activities, and this number is expected to sharply rise in future. Development of a high biodiversity with the complete



set of typical Karst grassland species should take a few years, but the restored Pian del Grisa site is of high conservation importance already now.
Does the Action take into account the climate change? Does it include adaptation measures?
As the typical flora and fauna of the Karst grassland consist mainly of thermophile and drought-resistant species, global warming will not be as detrimental here as in almost all other habitats. Therefore no explicit measures considering and concerning climate change were necessary. The Pian del Grisa site is one of the few patches of nature where no greatly adverse impacts of climate change can be expected in the near future. Additionally, since black pine is a flammable species, cutting down pines will actually provide greater resilience against future fires.
Has the Action any negative impact?
No, none of relevance could be identified.

6.3. Socio-economic impact, policy

Assess the (anticipated) impact on the local community
The pilot action has involved many stakeholders from the fields of science, economy, politics and landscape conservation, creating and strengthening contacts between them and promoting holistic approaches to regional development. The activity also increases the awareness of the natural values of the Karst and the European Green Belt and furthers local people's identification with their local unique nature. It has created an attractive area for landscape-based recreation close to the city of Trieste.
Assess the (anticipated) economic impact
The pilot action is improving the situation for local small-scale farmers both by offering new grazing grounds for their sheep and cattle (in a situation where many of the former grazing areas are not available any more due to legally becoming forests or being built up) and by thus offering an opportunity to earn an income.
Policy issues
The goals and requirements of EU policies like the Biodiversity Strategy, the Farm to Fork Strategy, the Green Infrastructure Strategy and EU legislation like the Regulation on Rural Development, the Natura 2000 directives and multiple others have been realized in the pilot area, and the measures can serve as a blueprint and best practice for similar actions elsewhere. Furthermore, compiling the scientific basis for the action and the monitoring measures have enhanced knowledge on landscape ecology and species, which provides data for future regional planning and policymaking.

7. Summary of strengths and weaknesses and lessons learned

Main strengths, highlights
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sound scientific basis and good transposition into concrete action • Effective benefit for nature conservation without relevant negative side effects • Very diverse and useful stakeholder involvement



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very fast realization • Long-term durability of the achieved results
Main weaknesses
No relevant weaknesses were recognized.
Lessons learned
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thorough preparation and intensive collection of expertise from stakeholder is a major prerequisite for good results, as is good cooperation between e.g. Gos and NGOs • Quality results require good experts • The international cooperation in ReCo supplied beneficial input • The peer review visit provided substantial mutual learning and international expertise; the gained knowledge will improve future activities not only in Pian del Grisa

8. Key messages

Recommendations for reviewed Action
As an excellent performance has been assessed, the major recommendation of the peer review team is to keep up the good work and to continue with the proved and tested practices.
Recommendations for all project partners: transferable results
The results in Pian del Grisa are not directly transferable to other pilot areas within ReCo since both the habitats and the objectives show major differences. However, the professional work and good stakeholder integration are assets that can be recommended within ReCo and beyond.
Policy messages
The EU's Agricultural Policy was heavily criticized by stakeholders in not honoring small-scale agriculture and the benefits it provides and underlined this with multiple examples which suggest that substantial changes in this policy are not only necessary to preserve such agriculture, but would also provide extensive benefits to national economy, society and the environment.



9. Photo documentation



Rare plant cultivation at Villa Volpares nursery



Indigenous plant cultivation in Greenhouse at Villa Volpares



Aerial view of Villa Volpares plant nursery



Typical native breed sheep at Antonič's Farm; such sheep are to be used for grazing at the Pian del Grisa pilot site



Stakeholder round table at Osmiza Fabec



Area cleared of shrubs at Pian del Grisa with new plant growth already developing and a patch that is still largely bare of vegetation and usable for planting the cultivated plants from the nursery



Aerial view of a part of the cleared area at Pian del Grisa



Capturing carabid beetles for monitoring



Final discussion of the peer review team gathering recommendations, conclusions and exchanging international good practice solutions



The ReCo project consortium consists of:

- Bavarian Branch of Friends of the Earth Germany (Lead Partner, Germany)
- DOPPS - BirdLife Slovenia (Slovenia)
- Ametyst (Czech Republic)
- Federacja Zielonych “GAJA”, NGO (Poland)
- Thayatal National Park (Austria)
- University of Vienna (Austria)
- Landscape Research Institute (Czech Republic)
- BSC - Business support organisation ltd., Kranj (Slovenia)
- Podyjí National Park Administration (Czech Republic)
- Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic (Czech Republic)
- WWF Italy (Italy)

www.interreg-central.eu/projects/reco

Nationalpark
Thayatal



BSC

Business Support Centre Kranj
Regional Development Agency of Gorenjska



Výzkumný
ústav pro
krajinu



Ametyst



FEDERACJA
ZIELONYCH

GAJA



Ministry of the Environment
of the Czech Republic



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