

Wildlife Estates Label in Flanders

The Wildlife Estates (WE) Label has been developed to acknowledge exemplary management of European territories. It targets (mostly private) landowners and managers of such territories and encourages them to join the WE initiative to acquire recognition for their commitment to sustainable wildlife and habitat management. This commitment is continuous and formalized in the WE Charter.



Summary

Estates and territories adhere on a voluntary basis. They commit to maintain and developing high standards of wildlife management, with emphasis on habitats. This involves all aspects of multifunctional estate management. They are assessed according to a scientific based method (www.wildlife-estates.eu), which has been adapted to national or regional specificities.

Aspects covered are:

1. Level of stillness/tranquility/surveillance
2. Existence of measures that help the sustainable balance between agriculture, silviculture, cinegenic management, pisciculture/fishing
3. Natural, semi-natural and intensive hunting or fishing grounds
4. Biodiversity surface
5. Food availability
6. Water availability
7. Presence of restoration measures and improvements to habitat holding capacity for wildlife Presence of prey species
8. Presence of valuable species of fauna
9. Treatment and destination of venison
10. Implication of local actors
11. Conservation of cultural and historic heritage
12. Communication program

In the Flemish Region of Belgium, more than 8500 hectares have been labeled. Monitoring is part of the assessment and the label is awarded on a 5 years basis. After this period, management goals and achievements need to be re-evaluated and WE Charter commitments renewed.

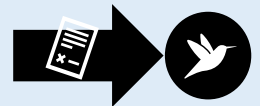


Objectives

Participation in the WE Label takes place on a voluntary basis by landowners and managers to work on sustainable management, conservation of biodiversity and development of fauna and flora, based on their own integrated vision of ecological, economic and social functions. Wildlife Estates regularly communicates about best practices and optimal management techniques that are developed and applied by members. It also informs the general public about the importance of estates in ecological, economic and social terms.

LABELLING MECHANISM

RESULT-BASED



Implementation based on voluntary agreements (charter-based) for continuous practice. The label is awarded on the basis of a scientific method and assessment.

COLLECTIVE



The label is awarded to individual estates, but the WE organization develops a wildlife management network for responsible wildlife management according to multifunctional practice.

PUBLIC GOODS



Landscape and scenery



Recreational access / Improvements to physical and mental health



Biodiversity



Resilience to natural hazards



Rural viability and vitality



Cultural heritage



Soil quality (and health)



Farm animal health and welfare

INDIRECT EFFECTS

- Air quality
- Climate regulation- carbon storage
- Climate regulation - greenhouse gas emissions
- Quality and security of products
- Water quality

LOCATION

BELGIUM



Whole countryside of Flanders, i.e. the Flemish Region of Belgium.

Data and Facts - Contract

Contract feature combination: Voluntary commitment to the WE Charter. The WE Charter refers to further commitments.

Participation:

- Number of farms/foresters/contractors: 27 estates have obtained the WE Label.
- Area of implementation: Estates or territories in the Flemish Region of Belgium.
- Other participants: The labels are awarded to the managers of estates or territories.

Involved parties: Wildlife Estates organization (national and European level) on the one hand and the individual estates and territories on the other, organized as a network at a country level. In casu, 27 labeled WE Estates for the Flemish Region of Belgium.

Advantages of participation:

1. To be recognized as a front-runner - Labelled estates are committed to, and accredited for, promoting the best management and conservation practices, and are recognized as managing their wildlife resources sustainably in full consideration for the natural environment.
2. To improve and develop - The WE Label provides a framework that facilitates development and implementation of new and innovative management techniques. WE enable its members to address and efficiently resolve conflicts in order to ensure an effective balance between voluntary actions, incentives, and regulation.
3. To engage - WE encourage communication between Wildlife Estate managers with the aim of sharing ideas and management strategies that help improve the standards substantially. The initiative seeks to reach a global agreement between managers of Wildlife Estates, to identify good practices, and promote innovative activities and techniques.
4. To be supported - The activities of land managers, hunters and fishermen are under pressure. By adhering to the WE Label Commitments, they will be taking the necessary precautions to anticipate themselves from European legislation regarding the management of their land, as far as rural activities such as hunting, shooting, and fishing are concerned. Moreover, WE aim to anticipate new requirements in order to always be in line with the Birds and the Habitats Directives, which make up the Natura 2000.
5. To be informed - Having acquired the WE Label, the member is invited to become a part of WE network. Each territory manager will then have access to relevant and up-to-date articles and documents and details of upcoming events through the WE Newsletter.

Management requirements for farmers: Voluntary commitment to the WE Charter. http://www.wildlife-estates.eu/tartalom/ten_commitments.pdf

Controls/monitoring: The WE Label is self-monitoring and on a voluntary basis. Established infringements on the WE Charter can lead to suspension or revocation of the WE Label.

The renewal of the WE Label is on a 5-year basis. The complete scientific-based approval method with field visits is re-applied for renewal.

Conditions of participation: The WE Label has been developed to acknowledge exemplary management of European territories. It targets landowners and managers of such territories and encourages them to join the WE initiative to acquire recognition for their commitment to sustainable wildlife management.

All estates are welcome to apply. There are no restrictions in terms of hectares, location or activity. The only expectation is for applicant estates to have a uniform management on their territory.

Risk/uncertainties of participants: No Risk/uncertainties of participants. The Label involves a commitment on an objective best-efforts basis.

Links to other contractual relationships: No direct links to other contractual relationships.

Funding/Payments: Lump sum fee paid by the WE Label applicant, once the WE label has been awarded.

Contract partnership: WE Label organization (civil society) and estate landowner or territory manager (private).

Since its creation, the WE Label has been facilitating collaboration between private and public actors in order to illustrate that the work undertaken by land managers is very much in line with the central tenets of biodiversity conservation. This has involved the creation of National Delegations to engage with both private and public actors, such as NGOs, administrative bodies, universities, independent scientists, and even companies.

The WE Label is currently represented in 19 European countries, mostly through a decentralized network. The Wildlife Estates secretariat is situated in Brussels, Belgium, where it coordinates the activities of the National WE-Delegations.

Information/Contact: www.wildlife-estates.eu

CONTRACT

Contract conclusion:

Written agreement -
Signature of the WE
Charter



Payment mechanism:

Lump sum fee for label



Financing:

Market sector-oriented



Length of participation in scheme:

WE Label is awarded
for a 5-year term.

Renewal is possible
after 5 years. Re-
application process.

Start of the program:

The WE Label is
available in the Flemish
Region of Belgium since
the start of 2018.

End: The WE Label is
awarded for a 5-year
period.

Context features

Landscape and climate: Atlantic climate. In Flanders, forest covers only about 11% of the total area. Forests are often originating from plantations on former heathlands and wet grasslands: pine and poplar plantations make up almost half of the forest area, while only 1/3 of the forest area consists of broadleaved stands of indigenous species (oak (*Quercus spp.*), beech (*Fagus sylvatica L.*), mixed deciduous stands). Forests in Flanders are clearly part of an urbanized and industrialized region. In this context, forest goods and services are mainly related to socio-cultural and ecological services. This is comparable to regions like the Netherlands, parts of Denmark and southern UK.

Agriculture: Over the last ten years, the total arable area has remained relatively stable (-1.7%). 46% of the Flemish arable area, or 622.738 ha, is utilized for agriculture and horticulture. Meadows, pasturelands and fodder crops account for 56% of the total area. The arable surface is 36% owned, the rest is on lease.

The agriculture is characterized by a strong degree of specialization. Almost nine out of ten companies specialize in one of three subsectors. 54% of the companies have a specialization in cattle breeding, 21% in arable crops and 13% in horticulture.

Structure: Farm and forestry types which business model is respectful of the environment and biodiversity. This is an open category as far as the WE Label is concerned, but real practices need to be established for obtaining it. In Flanders, the practice of agri-environmental measures in farming and the application of the Criteria Integrated Nature Management for forestry activities are the main indicators for describing the types of farming and forestry targeted by the Label.

Problem description

Traditional multifunctional estates (*landgoederen*) and territories managed by hunting management associations (*wildbeheereenheden*) are major contributors to biodiversity in Flanders, although their action often is very private and not communicated at all.

This can only be achieved through the voluntary engagement of and intense cooperation between the many (mostly private) managers of the outlying areas such as farmers, estate managers, nature and forest managers, hunters, fishermen and others, all of whom are very important but often play an ignored role in preserving fauna and flora. They form the most important link in the realization of sustainable rural development.

Where good results for biodiversity on private estates are already being measured, this is very often due to a well-balanced balance between the ecological, economic and social functions of management. The WE Label uncovers the quality of caring stewardship for the benefit of nature conservation to the outside world. The land managers who endorse the principles of the WE Label do so on a voluntary basis, not because it is imposed by the government.

It is their healthy, conservative attitude that is bearing fruit for biodiversity. Where good practices are used that consider both economic and ecological aspects, landowners and managers produce biodiversity, in other words: the natural support on which unique habitats and species can thrive. The added value that is offered here is enormous, also social. The WE Label wants to make this known and raise the expertise that comes with it as standard, so that many land managers can benefit from this expertise and refer to it.



SUCCESS OR FAILURE?



The Wildlife Estates Label presents a successful contract solution. In Flanders, since February 2018, 27 estates have obtained the label, representing more than 8.500 ha.

Reasons for success:

See Main strengths under SWOT analysis.

SWOT analysis



Main external factors influencing success

Political/governance, economic/market, social, technological, legal and environmental factors can all have a strong impact on the success of contract solutions. In this case study an in-depth analysis found that the following, selected factors were of specific importance.

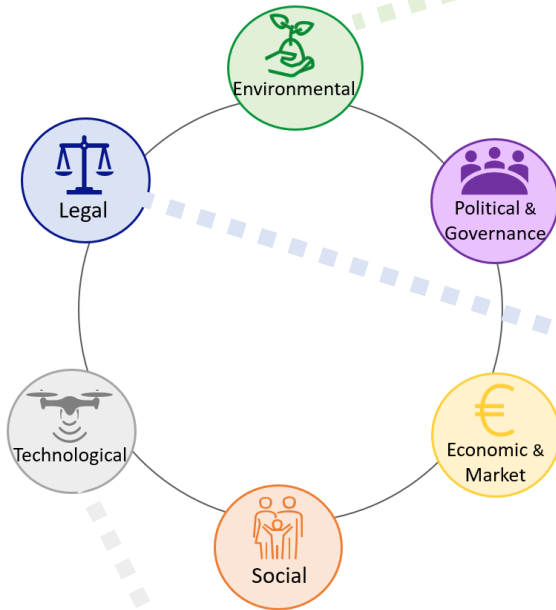


Jumping on an already moving train of environmental protection: The Wildlife Estate Label in Flanders in parts rewards the past and supports the continuing sustainable development of the regional agricultural system: In the case study area of Flanders, the agricultural system has already made **a transition from intensive monocultures and landscape mismanagement**, leading to an impoverishment of soils and forest as well as to a loss of biodiversity, towards **a more integrated and multifunctional estate management**.



This transition was mainly fed by the greening policy of the CAP and the adoption and promotion of agri-environmental measures by government agencies.

"The label now presents a validation of the successes reached."



Agricultural tenure as a hindering factor: The regulatory environment, in general, is in favour of biodiversity, except for agricultural assignment.

In Flanders, legislation concerning agricultural leases is imperative and protective of the tenant and does not allow for any ecological clauses, as in other countries.

The condition description of the land in agricultural leases is often lacking or insufficiently used, for example:

- manure,
- erosion,
- the environment
- agroforestry
- small landscape elements.



Agreements about fauna and wildlife, landscape and other elements should be rendered possible through free negotiations without constituting a limit to the freedom of cultivation of the tenant.

Using specific technologies for the implementation of measures in the fields:

For the Wildlife estate label, adopting mechanical techniques in agriculture, forestry, etc., adapted to biodiversity improvement might necessitate specific agricultural and forestry technologies and equipment.

Examples are **unique equipment for mowing as strip-till** and **special techniques for logging wood**.