

Flemish nature management plan

Different owners and managers develop common and differentiated management goals for their respective territories for developing sustainable nature and forestry; integrated management, according to the Flemish Integrated Management Criteria (ecology, economy, social and heritage dimension aspects).



Objectives

The nature management plan describes the most important values of an area for its ecological, social and economic function and makes well-founded choices about the important objectives for this area. The plan must also clarify which measures are required for this, and how and where they are implemented. One also wants to know whether the area under management is actually evolving in the right direction and, where necessary, adjusting management is needed. A nature management plan has a term of 24 years, unless determined otherwise when approved. In addition, the nature management plan is an administrative document. It is a contract between the government and the manager in which certain fees stand against certain commitments. The nature management plan is also a way to test whether the planned goals and measures are in accordance with policy preconditions, such as N2000 management plans, species protection programs or protected landscapes. This requires that the goals and measures are formulated unambiguously and according to an agreed terminology.



Problem description

In the region of Flanders forests and nature legally are managed through one type of plan – the nature management plan. This plan replaces all previous management plans:

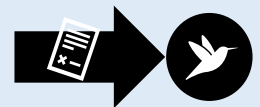
- basic forest management plan
- extended forest management plan
- management plan for forest reserves
- management plan for nature reserves
- management plan for verges
- management plan for parks

The nature management plan is a voluntary contract under administrative law between the Flemish government and the manager(s) of nature and forests.

Advantages of the nature management plan:

- single approval procedure for all types of nature (forest, heath, open green space, ...)
- transparent and organized
- linked to subsidies
- nature and forest management plan is valid for 24 years – evaluation every six years, no further administrative approvals needed
- public bodies, NGO's and private owners use the same system and get equal opportunities
- a nature management plan is a constructive tool for the long term planning of a plot of forest or nature

COLLECTIVE and RESULT- ORIENTED



Voluntary participation. Collective implementation and differentiated monitoring of results, benefits are handled and paid per nature management plan, but calculated according to the differentiated participating owners/managers.

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)



Water quality



Water quantity (e.g. water
retention)

INDIRECT EFFECTS

- Climate regulation-
carbon storage
- Climate regulation -
greenhouse gas
emissions
- Air quality

Data and Facts - Contract

Participation: The number of participants, i.e. forest and nature managers and/or owners, is open.

Involved parties: Agency for nature and forest on the government side; nature and forest managers on the other side.

Management requirements: There are four categories of nature management plans, with different implications as far as commitments, subsidies and tax benefits are concerned.

With type one nature management plans, the manager ensures that the current nature value and quality and natural environment are maintained and that the duty of care is observed: in the event of interventions in nature, destruction or damage is prevented, limited or repaired as much as possible. Nature management plans under type one are not entitled to subsidies except those related to accessibility.

Nature management plans of type two have as objective enhanced nature quality (25% of the surface reserved for nature objectives). A partial exemption from inheritance tax and gift tax is linked to this type as well as various subsidies: subsidies for accessibility for visitors, for development of a nature management plan, nature management subsidies, ...

Nature management plans of type three have as objective the highest quality of nature (on the whole of the plan surface, with a possible 10% exemption) A partial exemption from inheritance tax and a total exemption of gift tax is linked to this type, as well as various subsidies: subsidies for accessibility for visitors, for development of a nature management plan, nature management subsidies, ...

Nature management plans of type four have the status of nature reserves and the objective of the highest quality of nature (easement created by law on the whole plan surface). They entitle to the same subsidies as type three and provide the benefit of total exemption of inheritance tax, gift tax, sale tax, property tax.

Nature management plans for sites of type two, three and four also need to meet the criteria for integrated nature management. They form a guideline and serve as a guarantee for sustainable management tailored to the nature or forest area.

The criteria for integrated nature management are grouped in 3 themes:

1. achieving an increased or the highest quality of nature;
2. taking into account the social role of the site;
3. dealing with the economic delivery of various goods and services in a sustainable manner.

These criteria must be met in a reasonable and technically responsible manner, without any of the criteria having to be met all the time on the whole site. Deviation is possible, provided motivation is given in the nature management plan, whereby it is demonstrated that the relevant criterion is not applicable or not relevant and to the extent that the deviation does not impede the realization of the management objectives.

The management objectives and measures in a nature management plan must also be checked against the following approved plans and programs:

- the European nature objectives in the context of Natura 2000 and the provisions of the Natura 2000 management plan
- the species protection programs
- the nature guidelines already established.

Controls/monitoring: Provisions are made in the nature management plan on the extent and ways in which the manager will need to reach the objectives and how this will be monitored and reported to the agency. The agency performs a management evaluation based on these data every 6 years, checking whether the management is on track to meet the management objectives. If necessary, the agency will propose deviating management measures in its evaluation report. If it turns out that the management objectives themselves are not feasible, the agency can ask the manager to submit a request to change the management plan.

CONTRACT

Contract conclusion:

Administrative contractual instrument, official nature management plan approval



Payment mechanism:

Subsidies and tax benefits



Financing party:

Government (without EU-funding)



Length of participation in scheme:

24 years (participation is transferable)

Start of the program:

The Flemish nature management plan has a duration of 24 years, depending on the official approval date.

Risk/uncertainties of participants: Risk of not reaching objectives (subsidies are linked to the evaluation of the objectives); risk of financing (if government subsidies are reduced); risk of change of regulation during the course of the nature management plan, which can imply legal uncertainty.

Links to other contractual relationships: The participant landowners/managers need to adapt their other contractual relationships applicable to the area or site concerned to conform to the nature management plan. Otherwise their responsibility for not meeting their commitments will be engaged.

Funding/payments: Government subsidies type of payment on an annual basis. Agency for nature and forest is paying agent. Amounts are fixed per nature objective and following their realization (cfr. monitoring), with inflation correction. Per nature management plan, one legal or natural person has been chosen by the participants to be the official intermediary towards the agency. Funds are channeled through that intermediary to the participants.

Contract partnership: Public-private - The nature management plan is a voluntary contract under administrative law between government and the manager of nature and forests.



Context features

Landscape and climate: Atlantic climate. In Flanders, forests cover 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 also related to socio-cultural and ecological services. This is comparable to regions like the Netherlands, parts of Denmark and southern UK.

Structure: All forest or nature managers can apply for this administrative contractual instrument, if legal conditions are met. The contractual solution is not directed to a specific profile of managers, but is intended to guarantee equal access to nature management status to all managers.

LOCATION

BELGIUM



Flemish Region of Belgium (five provinces, half of country).



SUCCESS OR FAILURE?



The Flemish nature management plan presents a successful contract solution. In Flanders, a third of the total area under effective nature management comprises forests owned by third parties (not owned or managed by government or NGO's) with an approved management plan. This category increased in area by 2,097 ha in 2018 (compared to a total increase of all categories of 4,748 ha in 2018). This is evidence that the model of integrated nature management plans introduced in 2014 and 2017 has the necessary appeal amidst private nature and forestry managers, for whom participation to such a plan is on a voluntary basis.

Reasons for success:

See Main Strengths under SWOT analysis.

SWOT analysis

