

Una manera de hacer Europa



BUENAS PRÁCTICAS

Actuaciones Cofinanciadas

Project for the conservation of the Carrizal de Cofín Wetlands, Alfaro (La Rioja)
General Directorate for Biodiversity of the Regional Ministry for Sustainability and Ecological Transition

Programa Operativo de La Rioja

Año 2019

Fondo Europeo de Desarrollo Regional

Project for the conservation of the Carrizal de Cofin Wetlands, Alfaro (La Rioja).

The action taken has consisted in a project to totally transform the Carrizal (Reedbed) de Cofin zone, located within the boundaries of the town of Alfaro in the Rioja Baja, so as to adapt the structure of cultivar tables and abandoned farmlands (former rice fields and fields for growing bulrushes), refurbishing the existing irrigation infrastructure and making use of the surplus water from a nearby industrial complex, runoff waters and the irrigation water from the Lodosa canal to manage and improve the water and saline systems and foster the biodiversity of the area.

To complement this natural restoration, a space has been adapted to encourage its use for recreational and educational purposes. In this regard, a path has been constructed through the whole Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in its southern part, a car park has been created at the entrance from the neighbouring town of Alfaro and a lookout point over the sheet of water with information panels.

The Carrizal de Cofin reedbed is an excellent example, at regional level, of the Mediterranean ecosystems typical of the gorges and seasonal wetlands characterised by the significant presence of halophilic (with high concentrations of salts) and aquatic habitats. The Cofin spot and its surroundings are also home to large populations of wildfowl, whether nesting birds or seasonal visitors. Over the course of the year you can find up to 192 different species of birds.



This area and its surroundings were declared an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty of La Rioja in 2017 and the wetlands, which are in the central part, have formed part of the Spanish Wetlands Inventory since 2010, which were key motives behind the decision to conduct this project of adaptation and conservation of its natural values.

The action being offered as a **Best Practice** has been promoted by the General Directorate for Biodiversity of the Regional Ministry for Sustainability and Ecological Transition. It represents an investment of 314,994 €, of which 50% (157,497 €) is co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

Regarding the impact of these actions, we can point out that the project has involved the adaptation and improvement of 102.68 hectares of surface area and 142 hectares of wetlands

Criteria identifying the best practice:

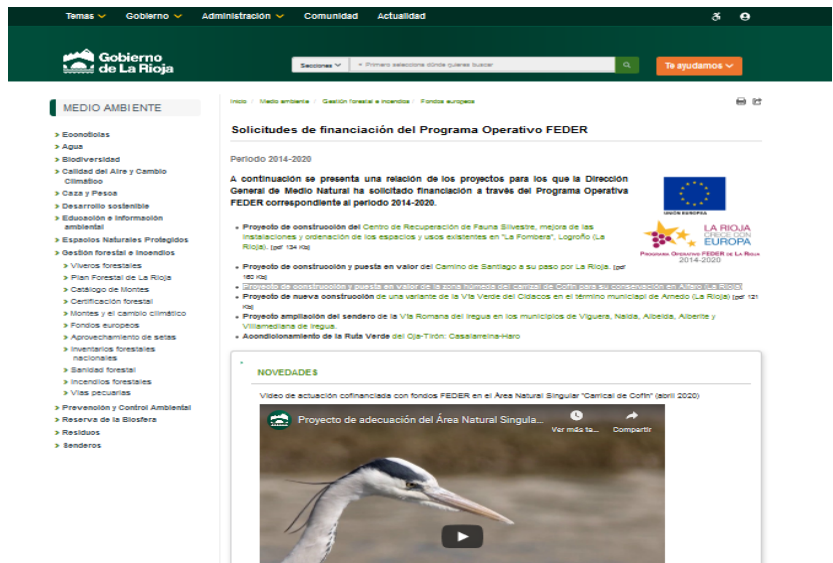
1.- The action has been appropriately disseminated among the beneficiaries, potential beneficiaries and the general public.

The action has been disseminated in accordance with the communication requirements laid down by the regulations, with the informational poster displayed during the execution and later posting of a permanent notice, as well as the posters with explanations on display, with a specific reference to the contribution of the European Regional Development Fund to this project:



This action has been disseminated several times through the different means of information and publicity used, for example in press releases and news items posted on the Government of La Rioja web site.

Such visibility has been backed up by the information contained in the specific section of the web page of the Dirección General de Biodiversidad regarding this action which it is promoting within the framework of the ERDF PO for La Rioja 2014-2020:



Press releases from the regional Government at the moment of finalisation of the work:

<https://actualidad.larioja.org/noticia?n=not-ceniceros-visita-la-adequacion-de-la-zona-humeda-del-carrizal-de-cofin-que-garantizara-la-cons>



Press releases published in various communication media:



<https://www.europapress.es/la-rioja/noticia-ceniceros-visita-adequacion-zona-humeda-carrizal-cofin-garantizara-conservacion-valores-naturales-20190301183930.html>

<https://www.rioja2.com/n-129337-2-alfaro-mejora-el-entorno-del-carrizal-de-cofin-y-el-barrio-del-burgo/>

In addition, the magazine “Páginas de Información Ambiental”, edited and published by the Regional Ministry for Sustainability and Ecological Transition, in printed and digital format, (<https://www.larioja.org/larioja-client/cm/medio-ambiente/images?idMmedia=1158215>), published a **lengthy article** in the August 2019 edition devoted to the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty of La Rioja, in which it makes reference to the **Carrizal de Cofin** and the co-funding of ERDF funds it has received.



And a **promotional video**: “EL CARRIZAL DE COFIN RENACE” has been produced to inform the general public about the natural values of this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the goals of the project financed with ERDF funds.

<https://youtu.be/8Mt4Z63yrUk>

<https://www.larioja.org/medio-ambiente/es/gestion-forestal-incendios/fondos-europeos/contenido/fondos->

europeos-2014-2020/solicitudes-financiacion-programa-operativo-feder

Finally, the action has also been disseminated via **social networks**



2.- The action introduces innovative elements.

The novelty in the solution offered by this project lies in the use made of the structure of the tables of cultivars (rice fields), now populated with reeds, to use them as a **green filter**; that is, the reedbed acts as a natural water treatment system as is typical of wetland ecosystems, to clean and purify the waste water before it passes into the lagoon.

In this way, this system makes the runoff water, the water from the Lodosa Canal and the treated surplus water from the nearby industrial estate, in particular the Kraft-Heinz company, pass through the tables enabling a **double natural purification**. This twice-treated water which comes out of the reedbeds is diverted until it reaches the lagoon which has been created in the central space of the area. The creation of this lagoon will provide a home for species of interest throughout the year and which prior to its creation were not found in the zone, improving biological diversification in the area. Among the animal species of interest present are the odonata (dragonfly), lepidoptera (butterflies) amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals linked to these types of habitats.

The water which comes out of the lagoon, by gravity, returns to the systems of ditches; and through the drains, help the temporary flooding in winter of the former agricultural tables of the lower part of the wetlands where there is vegetation adapted to lands with high concentration of salts of greater interest, thereby encouraging the presence of seasonal species who live in the silt or sludge.

3- Matching the results obtained to the established goals.

The objectives of the action have been aimed at allowing control of water management in this space and recovering a wetland occupied by old farmland through the use of waste water from a nearby industrial complex, so as to guarantee the conservation of the natural values, maintain the zone's biodiversity and to showcase this spot declared an area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

This has been achieved by adapting the hydraulic infrastructures necessary for managing the reedbanks, thereby ensuring that the water conditions are maintained in spring and summer to make nesting by marsh harriers viable. In addition, a permanent sheet of open water has been created which will enable species of water fowl which were not previously present to establish themselves there. And, finally, the structure of the fields has been recovered and the irrigation systems adapted in order to favour temporary flooding in winter to encourage the presence of seasonal birds.



Another key aim has been to create a space of great biological interest and to foster its recreational and educational use. For this purpose, a perimeter path has been constructed along the whole southern edge of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a car and coach park has been created in the entrance from the neighbouring town of Alfaro, and a lookout point with views of the reedbanks and the lagoon, from which visitors can enjoy magnificent views as well as the fauna which visit the Cofin wetlands, with panels installed with explanations to help the public understand the space, the species and the natural values it is home to.

4.- Contribution to solving a problem or weakness detected in the area of execution.

Over 40 years ago, the farmers from the Rioja Baja area of Alfaro wanted to exploit the Mediterranean climate conditions of their land along with the area's soil impermeability for growing rice crops. In fact, it was one of the few places in the region, if not the only one, where you could find tables of rice fields. The crop's low profitability meant that they stopped growing it and together with other abandoned fields in the zone which had in the past been used to produce bulrushes used for making baskets, matting and seats, these have served to create a wetland of



special interest colonised by reedbanks, salt marshes and the vegetation typical of the seasonal Mediterranean gorges and which serve as a home for numerous, valuable species of fauna.

The works carried out thanks to this action have permitted the development of the environmental assets of the place, particularly its potential to provide shelter to a wide variety of water fowl, whether nesting birds or migrating species, as well as preserving a vegetation adapted to salty land.



Another problem or weakness resolved is the shutting off of this wetland to road vehicles so as better to guarantee the establishment of the new species which do not see their habitat disturbed by the massive influx of the public. Moreover, the public way

provided keeps to the southern edge of the space, leaving a large part of the area inaccessible to visitors, ensuring peace and quiet for the species present there.

Finally, the execution of this work will encourage the recreational and educational use of a spot whose access to the public is difficult, thanks to the new infrastructures which have been provided in order to make it easier to visit.

5.- High level of coverage of the population it is aimed at.

The action has helped to improve the quality of the space in a broad sense, both from the biological point of view and the environmental and educational ones.

The scope of the coverage of this action will have a positive effect on the population of the town of Alfaro, and on the population of the Rioja Baja as a whole (around 73,000 inhabitants) due to the indirect benefits that it offers by increasing the opportunities for recreation and discovering nature which is so much in demand today, and so beneficial at a general level from the social and economic point of view, and contributing to the sustainable development of the region in this zone.

Moreover, it is an ideal place for environmental education for the schools of Alfaro and neighbouring villages. While in the Visitors' Centre which is located in the town centre they give information about the wetlands to the visiting public.



6.- Consideration of the transversal criteria of equal opportunities and non-discrimination, as well as social responsibility and environmental sustainability.

The principle of equal opportunities had been respected at all times. The project was awarded by public tender, thereby guaranteeing equal opportunities and no discrimination. Today, with the work complete and the zone fully restored, everybody has the same possibilities to access and enjoy the site.

In drafting the project plan, environmentally sustainable processes were taken into account. The ditches were made using earth so as to make the least possible environmental impact. In this way it has been possible to restore the zone without any negative effects on the surroundings. Moreover, during the execution of the project, there was exhaustive monitoring of the possible waste generated in the works, so as to dispose of it correctly.

The adaptation and conservation work have meant developing the environmental values of the place and, in particular, its potential as a home for a wide range of water fowl and other fauna associated with the features of the ecosystems present in the wetlands.

In addition, during the course of the work actions have been taken to help accessibility and the removal of architectural barriers in the zone for public use, so that a ramp provides access to the lookout for visitors with reduced mobility. The signposting has also been a key aspect in accessibility, with Braille plaques included in the information panels.

7.- Synergies with other policies or instruments of public intervention.

"El Carrizal de Cofin" is one of the **Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty of La Rioja**, and is therefore a natural space with singular features at regional level, due to its botanical, animal, ecological, landscape and geological assets in which there are 4 habitats of Community Interest.

So, showcasing this area joins the Nature Reserve of the Sotos (groves) of Alfaro and the stork colony in helping to consolidate Alfaro as one of the places of greatest interest with regard to natural resources in the Ebro Valley.



Consequently, it has been added to the **Programmes of Environmental Education** targeted at schoolchildren of all ages by carrying out environmental education activities in natural spaces of Rioja, which will be run in the coming years through the

visitors' centre in the town centre of Alfaro.

And over the last year, this space has been integrated into the **Programme of recreational activities in Protected Natural Spaces of La Rioja** which has an interesting offer with the prime aim of bringing the general public to the natural and cultural assets of the Protected Natural Spaces of La Rioja. For example, this programme offers experiences which help to make known the threatened species of La Rioja or other options for a public of any age: various levels of guided, educational visits, initiation and specialisation activities and activities focussed on natural resources.

As it is open to the public, this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty needs continuous maintenance of its infrastructures which involve carrying out projects of improvement and maintenance with the financial support of the **ERDF funds**, through its line of grants for investments in the construction, improvement and maintenance of infrastructures for recreational use and small-scale tourism. This means performing various tasks in the course of the year, such as pruning back and clearing scrub, and all the maintenance work and replacement



of furniture (benches, tables, etc.) connected with the path, the signposts giving directions and the panels of information and interpretation of the site.

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