CONSERVATION PLAN
AFTER-LIFE

Project
LIFE17 NAT/PL/000018
Renaturalisation of the inland delta of Nida River

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1. PROJECT INFORMATION:

Project name:	LIFE17 NAT/PL/000018 Renaturalisation of the inland delta of Nida River
Location:	Ponidzie, southern part of the Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship, Poland
NATURA 2000:	Natura 2000 Site Ostoja Nidziańska PLH260003 Special Protection Area for Birds PLB260001 Dolina Nidy
Project start date:	01/01/2019
Project end date:	30/09/2025
Duration:	81 months
Total budget:	EUR 5,473,145
EU co-financing:	EUR 3,283,888 (60%)
NFOŚiGW co-financing:	EUR 1,633,893 (30%)
Own contribution:	EUR 555,364 (10%)
Lead Beneficiary:	Swiętokrzyskie Voivodeship – The Complex of Swietokrzyskie and Nida River Landscape Parks in Kielce
Co-beneficiaries:	Institute of Nature Conservation, Polish Academy of Sciences, Kraków University of Agriculture, Kraków State Forests – Pińczów Forest District

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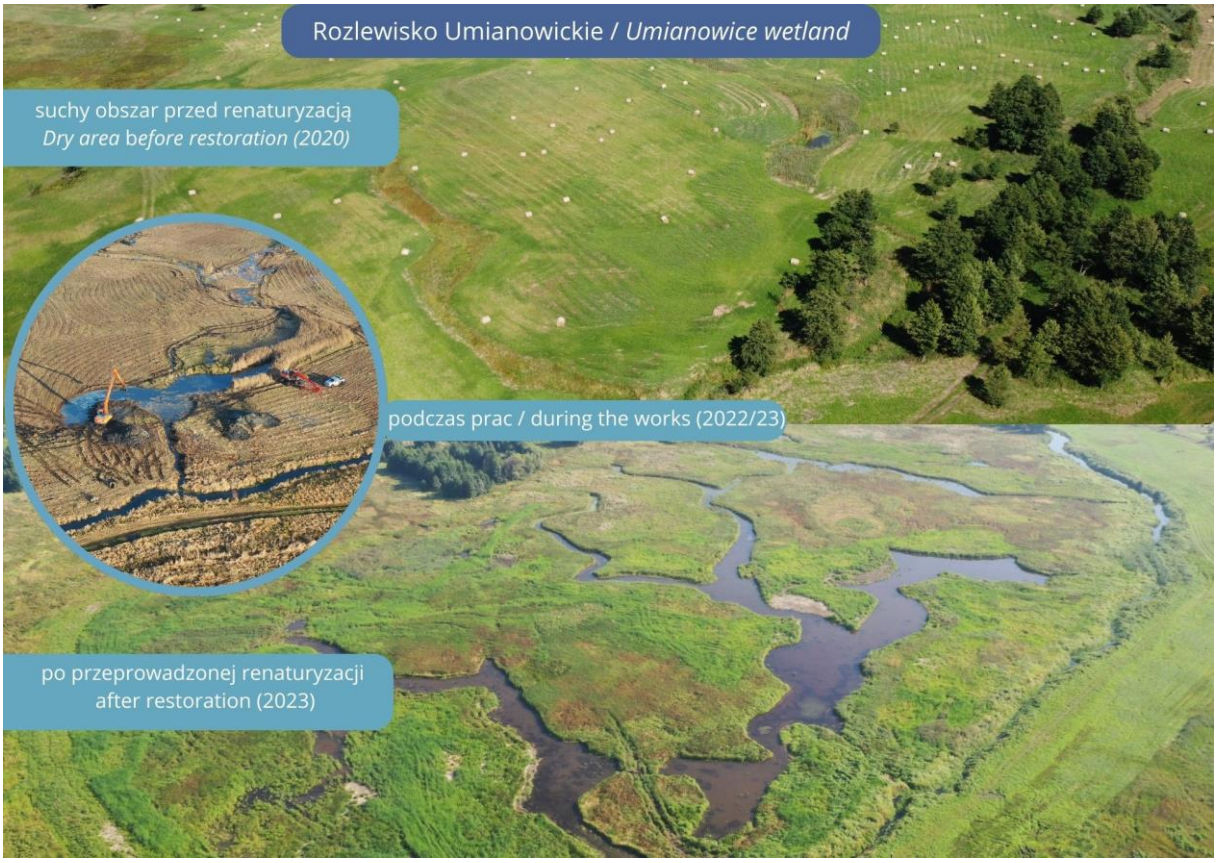
2. INTRODUCTION.

The inland delta of the Nida River is a unique area formed within a tectonic depression covering approximately 20 km², with its southern boundary marked by the Pińczów Ridge. This topographical arrangement naturally favored the formation of floodplains. The Nida River, collecting waters from the Świętokrzyskie Mountains, exhibits a steep gradient in its upper course, allowing it to transport large amounts of sediment. Upon reaching the extensive and flat area of the depression, the river slows down dramatically, losing its transport capacity and depositing most of the carried material.

This area was selected for the project due to the increasing threats to its unique habitats. These threats stemmed from two main factors.

First, incorrectly executed past drainage works between Rebow and Pińczów unnaturally accelerated the river's flow. Paradoxically, this led to the shallowing of the riverbed downstream, resulting in more frequent flooding, waterlogging of agricultural lands, and a real threat to property.

The second key factor was the abandonment of traditional pastoral and hayland management practices. This initiated succession processes, leading to the overgrowth of open areas, unfavorable changes in habitat composition, and the loss of characteristic plant species. At the same time, land drainage and the disappearance of local water bodies caused the loss of breeding sites for birds and amphibians. Changes associated with neglected land management were particularly visible in the forests around Młodzawy, where stagnant water contributed to the transformation of valuable riparian forests into alder carrs.



2.1. PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION:

The main objective of the project was to improve the hydrological conditions of the inland delta of the Nida River, contributing to the restoration of its unique natural values in line with the Habitats and Birds Directives. Particular attention was given to:

- Priority habitat * 91E0 Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* (*Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae*);
- Habitat 3150 Natural eutrophic lakes with *Magnopotamion* or *Hydrocharition*-type vegetation,
- Restoration of meadow habitats and provision of optimal conditions for birds (eg. *Crex crex*, *Porzana porzana*, *Ciconia ciconia*),
- Restoration or reinforcement of populations of strictly protected species: *Unio crassus*, *Anisus vorticulus*, *Vertigo moulinsiana*, *Bombina bombina, Triturus cristatus* and *Emys orbicularis*.

An intermediate objective of the project was the reintroduction of traditional grazing, which had been abandoned in the 1990s. This measure aims to ensure the long-term maintenance of meadow habitats and associated species in favorable conditions. Additionally, the project sought to activate the local community by raising ecological awareness and conducting extensive environmental education.
The project objectives were fully achieved through the following actions:

- **Regulation of water relations:** Actions C1 and C2 included the restoration or maintenance of watercourses, including the Smuga Umianowicka, Stara Nida, Feeder and rest of the old river beds improving habitats across the Delta and the ditches in the forest complex at Młodzawy, covering a total length of 21.85 km. Additionally, 19 hydraulic structures were maintained.
- **Land protection**: For conservation purposes, land was secured through the purchase of 53.87 ha, permanent management acquisition of 2.69 ha, and lease of State Treasury property covering 1.59 ha. In total, 58.15 ha of new land was secured for project purposes. The Lead Beneficiary also owns approximately 100 ha of land and has long-term permissions for activities on an additional ~100 ha.
- **Improvement of forest habitats:** The conservation status of *91E0 riparian forests was improved over a total area of 104.66 ha.
- **Restoration of meadow habitats**: 44.80 ha of 6510 lowland hay meadows 6510 and 28 ha of 6410 Molinia meadows were restored.
- **Flora protection**: A seed plantation was established to serve as a genetic reservoir for rare plant species.
- **Fauna protection:** Populations of rare species associated with aquatic and wetland habitats were restored or reinforced, including waders and other wetland birds, *Unio crassus*, *Triturus cristatus*, *Bombina bombina* and protected snail species.
- **Maintenance activities**: Regular preventive patrols were conducted and extensive land-use practices, such as grazing and mowing, were reinstated.

- **Education and targeted tourism:** Three nature trails with infrastructure (birdwatch hide, observation tower, footbridge, information boards) were constructed. They form the foundation of the Environmental Education Centre in Umianowice, which serves as the "gateway" to the delta for tens of thousands of visitors annually, guiding visitor flow and promoting responsible nature engagement.
- **Knowledge dissemination:** Numerous educational activities were organized, including workshops and lectures, targeting a wide range of audiences from schoolchildren to farmers**.**

It should be emphasized that the achievement of the above objectives is inseparably linked to the operation of the Environmental Education Centre in Umianowice. Its immediate proximity not only ensures daily supervision over the durability of the project results but also transforms the restored delta area into a living laboratory and a key tool in the Centre's educational mission.

2.2. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND THEIR RESULTS.

The foundation of all project activities, and the absolute priority, was the restoration of natural hydrological conditions across the delta. This was a prerequisite for the success of any further interventions. Central to these efforts were two key watercourses: the Stara Nida, the former blocked riverbed and the main water artery supplying the heart of the delta and the Smuga Umianowicka. Renovation and clearing works, based on precise hydrotechnical modelling, provided the ecosystem with a new, life-giving impulse. The re-watering of areas that had been drying for years and the restoration of the natural water pulsation cycle created a stable, self-regulating system. This system now forms the foundation for the sustainability of all restored habitats and species, and its maintenance will remain the primary focus of post-project actions.

On this prepared ground, specialized conservation measures were implemented, which can be seen as a process of bringing life back at multiple levels of ecosystem organization.

Restoring biodiversity – from habitats to species.
The processes of overgrowth and degradation most severely affected the riparian forests. The combination of restoring free water flow with carefully planned planting of native tree and shrub species allowed this process to be reversed. Degraded, quiet forest fragments, which were transforming into low-value alder carrs, began to regain their original, vibrant character and complex structure.

At the same time, on open meadow areas, sustainable mowing and extensive grazing were reinstated. This was not only a conservation action but also a return to traditional practices and the implementation of a lasting, natural landscape management tool. The patient, year-round work of Polish Konik horses and native cattle proved to be the most effective way to halt succession and preserve invaluable open habitats, which would otherwise quickly have been overrun by shrubs and trees.

Restored and properly managed habitats have become a safe base for direct species protection and reintroduction. The restoration of wetland habitats primarily benefited birds, with some species returning to the new floodplains that had not been observed there since the 1990s, such as the *Porzana porzana*. Amphibians also made a notable comeback, despite the severe drought that affected Poland during the project's implementation.



These actions were not one-off interventions but laid the foundations for self-sustaining, viable populations. A reintroduction program for the *Unio crassus* was developed and implemented, replenishing the Nida River and its branches with hundreds of individuals and establishing new, stable shoals of this critically endangered species.

A true symbol of the delta's revival was the return of the *Emys orbicularis*. After years of preparation, breeding, and research, the first individuals were released into their natural habitat. Equipped with telemetry transmitters, their movements are continuously monitored, providing invaluable data for future conservation actions and demonstrating the real effectiveness of the interventions undertaken.

Ensuring social sustainability – Education and responsible tourism.

The sustainability of the project relies not only on strong ecological foundations but also on public awareness and acceptance. To this end, three nature trails were designed and constructed, complete with supporting

infrastructure such as an observation tower and a bird hide. This is not a random collection of facilities but a carefully planned network that guides visitors safely and consciously through the most interesting sections of the restored delta.

At the heart of these operations is the Environmental Education Centre in Umianowice, which serves as the "gateway" and information hub for all visitors. It is through this infrastructure that extensive educational activities were implemented, reaching over 19,000 people. In this way, a significant social capital was created—a community of individuals who understand the importance of the Nida Delta and the need for its ongoing protection, becoming ambassadors for this unique area.

3. SITUATION ANALYSIS (SWOT ANALYSIS).

In September 2025, a meeting of the project beneficiaries was held to identify the project's strengths and weaknesses, as well as opportunities and threats in the context of its completion. During the project's sustainability phase, and in subsequent years, emphasis will be placed on maintaining the implemented actions and continuing proven active conservation methods. Equally important will be addressing areas where needs became apparent during the project's implementation.
This approach will enhance the effectiveness of undertaken measures and ensure their lasting, positive impact on the inland delta of the Nida River. The results of the SWOT analysis are presented in the table below.

Strengths – Internal, positive factors	Weaknesses – Internal, negative factors
Unique natural value of the area: The high importance of the site within the network of protected areas justifies the need for further actions and facilitates their planning.	**Administrative and procedural barriers:** Extensive bureaucracy and complex, rigid and time-consuming procedures — particularly regarding the legal status of land — pose significant delays to necessary and often urgent conservation interventions.
Institutional and human resource capacity of the Beneficiary: The Complex of Swietokrzyskie and Nida River Landscape Parks has a qualified and experienced staff and its formal status as a nature conservation institution ensures the ability to supervise activities and facilitates the acquisition of funding.	**Low awareness and acceptance of active conservation actions:** Limited knowledge among parts of the local community about the delta's unique values, along with incomplete understanding of the need for active conservation in some administrative bodies, can generate resistance and hinder the implementation of actions.
Strategic location and operational support: The immediate proximity of the office and the Environmental Education Centre in Umianowice guarantees daily, hands-on supervision of the project area and enables smooth continuation of project activities.	**Negative socio-economic trends in rural areas:** Declining interest in agriculture, reluctance to participate in training, rural depopulation and the lack of successors on farms represent a growing challenge to maintaining activities based on cooperation with local farmers such as grazing.
Durability and effectiveness of key actions: Carefully executed hydrological works ensure the stability of the water system, minimizing future maintenance costs. The scope of the implemented activities ensures high durability of the achieved ecological results.	**Vulnerability to macroeconomic factors:** Significant cost increases during the project (due to inflation and pandemic-related impacts) have demonstrated that the financial stability of future actions is highly dependent on the external economic situation.

Experience and established cooperation network: The beneficiaries' extensive experience in project implementation and their well-developed network of contacts with governmental organizations, universities, and NGOs provide a solid foundation for future joint initiatives.	

Opportunities – External, positive factors	Threats – External, negative factors
Development of sustainable tourism in the region: Growing interest in nature-based tourism and agritourism stimulates the need to invest in landscape and biodiversity protection, which can generate support for conservation actions.	**Lack of guaranteed funding for key actions:** High costs of certain measures combined with the absence of stable external funding represent the greatest threat to the project's long-term sustainability. This particularly applies to: Maintenance of grazing: the risk of having to reduce cattle numbers due to insufficient funds for permanent shepherd employment. Infrastructure repairs: the risk of lacking resources for costly maintenance of hydraulic structures after the warranty period.
Educational and replicable potential of the project: Effective educational activities have built social capital and the project's status as a model initiative can be used to promote good practices and secure funding for further actions. The Environmental Education Centre in Umianowice remains a key educational hub for the entire region.	**Unresolved infrastructural issues:** The lack of agreement and a coherent management strategy for the Rębow hydropower plant is critical for the delta's hydrology and constitutes a constant, serious threat. The overall increase in interest in hydropower may exacerbate this issue.
Strengthening inter-institutional cooperation: A large network of contacts and growing interest in the region create opportunities to formalize and expand cooperation with key stakeholders (Polish Waters, State Forests, NGOs) to share responsibilities and costs.	**Invasive alien species (IAS):** The absence of a consistent national strategy to control IAS (e.g., *Perccottus glenii*) and insufficient understanding of their pathways and control methods pose a serious long-term threat to the biodiversity of the restored ecosystem.
	Global climate change: Prolonged, extreme droughts could undermine the effects of hydrological interventions and lead to renewed degradation of restored, valuable wetland habitats.

4. REVIEW OF INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS RESPONSIBLE FOR MANAGEMENT.

The entities listed below will be responsible for the long-term maintenance of the results of the LIFE4Delta project and for the successful implementation of this AfterLIFE plan. Acting within their statutory competencies and in the spirit of the partnership established during the project, they will ensure continuity and durability of the ecological outcomes achieved.

Primary responsible entities (Project Beneficiaries):

- **The Complex of Swietokrzyskie and Nida River Landscape Parks (ZSiNPK)**
  As the Lead Beneficiary, ZSiNPK is the natural heir and main guardian of the project's legacy. The institution bears the primary responsibility for comprehensive, integrated coordination of post-project actions. This role goes far beyond simple administration. It encompasses daily, proactive management of the restored ecosystem and its infrastructure, made possible by the strategic location of the Environmental Education Centre in Umianowice and the constant presence of qualified staff in the field. Key tasks of ZSiNPK will include carrying out essential maintenance activities, such as periodic mowing and clearing of watercourses, which is greatly facilitated by its equipment resources. Equally important will be the continuation of the educational mission, which builds social capital for nature conservation, and the leadership role in securing future funding for the most costly tasks.

- **Institute of Nature Conservation, Polish Academy of Sciences (IOP PAN):**
  As the project's scientific partner, the Institute serves as a guarantor of the scientific and technical correctness of future actions. Its responsibility will be to continue key components of biodiversity monitoring, which forms the foundation for adaptive management.
  The objective scientific data provided by IOP PAN will not only allow for the assessment of the long-term effectiveness of the implemented measures but, most importantly, will support informed and purposeful decision-making for future conservation interventions. It is precisely this scientific oversight that ensures the protection of the Nida Delta is knowledge-based rather than reliant on *ad hoc* actions.

- **University of Agriculture in Krakow (URK)**
  Continuing cooperation with URK will be crucial for understanding the long-term dynamics of hydrological changes in the restored ecosystem. Data provided by URK scientists will serve as an invaluable source of information, essential for the proper management of hydraulic infrastructure by ZSiNPK and for making strategic decisions in collaboration with Polish Waters (PGW Wody Polskie).

- **State Forests – Pinczow Forest District:**
  Continuing and formalizing the excellent cooperation with the Pinczow Forest District is a prerequisite for maintaining the positive ecological effects in the Mlodzawy forest complex. The goal will be to ensure the ongoing implementation of the reference forest concept, as well as to monitor and study changes resulting from the project activities, ultimately aiming to establish a nature reserve.

Strategic external partners.

The long-term success of conserving such a complex ecosystem cannot be achieved in isolation. It will be essential to transform the project-based cooperation with the partners listed below into permanent, formalized alliances dedicated to the protection of the delta.

- **Polish Waters (State Water Holding):**
  Cooperation with Polish Waters, as the main water management authority in Poland, is of absolutely critical importance for the hydrological stability of the entire area. It is necessary to develop durable, institutionalized mechanisms of cooperation to ensure that regional water management is conducted in a manner consistent with the delta's nature conservation objectives.
  In particular, this concerns agreeing on common principles for the maintenance of key watercourses and—one of the major identified threats—finding a binding, long-term solution for the operational rules of the hydropower plant in Rebow.

- **Local farmers and communities:**
  Although key maintenance activities, such as mowing and grazing, are carried out using the Beneficiary's own resources, the role of the local community remains crucial to the project's long-term success. Local residents are not merely task implementers but key stakeholders and "neighbors" of the restored delta. Building durable relationships based on trust and dialogue is a fundamental strategy for ensuring a supportive social environment for the project. Acceptance and understanding of the conservation measures by local residents minimize the risk of conflicts, vandalism (e.g. poaching, reed burning) and unintentional harmful activities. A well-informed community becomes an ally—the "eyes and ears" in the field—capable of alerting authorities to emerging threats. Therefore, the continued implementation of open communication and educational activities targeted at local residents will be a key task in building the social sustainability of the project results.

5. AFTERLIFE CONSERVATION PLAN – OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS.

This plan serves as a strategic and operational guide for activities to be implemented after the formal completion of LIFE project funding. Its main objective is to ensure the long-term sustainability of the results achieved through the restoration of the inland delta of the Nida River. The conservation actions implemented within the project accurately reflected the needs of individual habitats and species therefore, the After-LIFE plan provides for both the continuation of these measures and their supplementation with new actions, the need for which became apparent during the implementation of the project.

Strategic objectives of the AfterLIFE Plan:

Long-term conservation activities in the Nida River delta will be guided by the following strategic objectives:

- **Ecological sustainability**: Ensuring the stability of restored habitats and supporting processes leading to the self-sufficiency of reintroduced and reinforced species populations.
- **Adaptive management:** Conducting continuous monitoring as a basis for identifying emerging threats and for planning targeted and effective conservation measures.
- **Operational sustainability**: Ensuring the full functionality of infrastructure developed under the project, in particular hydrotechnical structures.
- **Social sustainability:** Consolidating positive public attitudes towards the conservation of the delta through the continuation of educational activities and the promotion of project results.

Main lines of action (Operational Plan):

The achievement of the above objectives will be ensured through the following cyclical operational activities:

- **Monitoring and maintenance of hydrotechnical infrastructure:**
  Continuous supervision of proper site water conditions and, consequently, the technical condition of key infrastructure (culverts, sluices and ditches) remains an absolute priority to ensure its correct functioning. These activities will be carried out by ZSiNPK's own staff, in close cooperation with the Polish Waters Holding.
- **Maintenance of extensive land use (grazing and mowing):**
  The continuation of grazing, implemented by ZSiNPK staff, will remain a key management and conservation tool to prevent succession in open meadow habitats, supplemented where necessary by intervention mowing.
- **Supervision and preventive patrols:**
  ZSiNPK staff will continue systematic preventive patrols throughout the project area to prevent vandalism, poaching and fires as well as to enable ongoing observation of ecosystem condition.
- **Continuation of active species conservation and control of alien species:**
  Conservation actions for the most valuable species will be intensively continued. This includes completion of the reintroduction process of the *Emys orbicularis*, as well as the continued implementation of breeding and population reinforcement programmes for the *Unio crassus*, *Anisus*

vorticulus and *Bombina bombina*. Key bird species will also remain under permanent protection, including the continuation of *Haliaeetus albicilla* nest monitoring. At the same time, actions aimed at eliminating or reducing the pressure of invasive alien species (*Perccottus glenii* and non-native ornamental turtles) will be implemented through their systematic removal.

- **Sustainable tourism, education and promotion:**
  The core of activities will be the promotion of a sustainable nature-based tourism model, based on channeling visitor traffic along designated educational trails. The Umianowice Centre will continue its educational mission addressed to a broad audience. An important element of community engagement will be the continuation of the Stork Nest citizen monitoring programme. In order to facilitate knowledge exchange and promote good practices, the organisation of scientific conferences and seminars will also be continued.
- **Scientific monitoring and evaluation of results:**
  Ongoing scientific monitoring is essential. ZSiNPK and IOP PAN will be responsible for monitoring biodiversity indicators, while key hydrological monitoring will continue in cooperation with the University of Agriculture in Krakow.

6. SUMMARY AND CHEDULE OF AFTERLIFE ACTIONS.

The table below provides a detailed overview of the actions to be continued under the After-LIFE Plan. It identifies the entities responsible for their implementation and presents an estimated relative level of costs associated with carrying them out.

Legend for estimated costs:

Symbol	Cost Level	Example Actions
€	Very low	Activities carried out as part of standard staff duties, with no additional material costs.
€€	Low	Dedicated tasks requiring significant work, materials or analyses (e.g., species breeding, scientific monitoring, purchase of educational materials).
€€€	Medium	Major, ongoing budget items requiring dedicated personnel and resources (e.g., year-round management of grazing herds).
€€€€	High	Główne, stałe pozycje budżetowe, wymagające dedykowanego personelu i zasobów (np. całoroczna opieka nad stadem do wypasu).
€€€€€	Very high	Unplanned costs associated with major failures or repairs (e.g., full renovation of hydrotechnical structures after the warranty period).

Table 1. Overview of project actions to be continued under the AfterLIFE Plan.

Action	Need for continuation	Responsible entity	Possible funding sources	Estimated cost
A3 GIS development and Meta-Model	YES. The GIS database will be systematically updated and maintained by a ZSiNPK staff member as part of their standard duties.	ZSiNPK	Own funds	€

C1/C2 Maintenance of infrastructure (hydrotechnical and in forest complex)	YES. Regular maintenance work (monitoring, clearing, minor repairs) is essential, along with close cooperation with Polish Waters to ensure the long-term ecological effectiveness of the actions.	ZSiNPK, Pinczow Forest District	Own funds	from €€ (routine maintenance) to €€€€€ (major repairs)
C4 Grazing management	YES. Continuation of grazing is a key tool for the conservation of non-forest habitats. ZSiNPK will maintain part of the herd, providing care, feed and supervision.	ZSiNPK	Own funds, agri-environmental subsidies, conservation breed programmes	€€€€
C5 Birds protection and monitoring	YES. ZSiNPK staff will continue monitoring of nesting platforms (stork, white-tailed eagle). The "Stork Nest" citizen monitoring programme will also continue	ZSiNPK	Own funds	€
C6-C11 Active conservation of other species	YES. Continuation of breeding, reintroduction, and population reinforcement programmes for the *Emys orbicularis*, *Unio crassus, Anisus vorticulus, Bombina bombina* and *Triturus cristatus* is essential. This includes the maintenance of laboratories, care of individuals and ongoing monitoring.	ZSiNPK IOP PAN	Own funds	€€€
C12 Maintenance of touristic infrastructure	YES. It is essential to ensure the good technical condition of trails and structures (observation tower, birdwatch hide) through regular inspections, maintenance checks and minor repairs, especially after the contractor's warranty has expired.	ZSiNPK	Own funds	from €€ (routine maintenance) to €€€€€ (major repairs)
C13 Patrols and interinstitutional cooperation	YES. Cyclical preventive patrols will be continued by ZŚiNPK staff. Equally important is maintaining ongoing cooperation with water	ZSiNPK	Own funds	€€

	management and forestry authorities.			
D1/D2 Scientific monitoring (environmental and hydrological)	YES. Continuation of monitoring is essential to evaluate outcomes and inform the planning of future actions.	IOP PAN UR Kraków	Own funds, Scientific grants	€€
E1/E2 Educational and promotional activities	YES. Educational activities will continue as part of the statutory work of the Environmental Education Centre. The website will be maintained and project results will be promoted at various conferences.	ZSiNPK and co-beneficiaries	Own funds Voivodeship Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management	€€€

7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS FOR THE FUTURE.

The Nida Valley, as a site of international importance within the Natura 2000 network and a key node in the European ecological network, has long been one of the most valuable natural areas in Poland. Unfortunately, due to improperly conducted regulatory works in the distant past, its central feature – the unique inland delta – suffered extensive degradation. The LIFE4Delta project was a response to this threat, and its implementation initiated renaturalisation processes that, due to their fundamental importance, will continue for years to come.

The comprehensive hydrological works carried out have restored stability to the water regime, which forms the foundation for the recovery of the delta's unique values. Equally important was the reintroduction of extensive grazing. This action not only effectively halted secondary succession processes but, as confirmed by scientific studies, significantly increased the biodiversity of meadow habitats. It also created suitable open areas for the nesting of valuable bird species such as the *Crex crex*, *Tringa totanus* and *Vanellus vanellus*. The continued maintenance of grazing will remain a key tool for the active conservation of these ecosystems.

The ecological effects of the project are most clearly illustrated by the spectacular return and reinforcement of wildlife. Newly created and restored water bodies have become vibrant habitats for amphibians – monitoring of the *Triturus cristatus* population has shown a several-fold increase in numbers. However, the true explosion of life is seen in the bird world. Rare species such as the *Botaurus stellaris*, *Porzana porzana* or *Porzana parva* as well as raptors and ducks like the *Spatula clypeata* have returned to the floodplains, while the wet meadows have become feeding grounds for *Anser anser* and migratory goose species. Most importantly, the restoration of a mosaic of meadow and wetland habitats has attracted numerous rare and threatened wader species. The probable breeding of the *Numenius arquata* in Międzyrzecze (2025), the presence of colonies of *Tringa tetanus*, *Vanellus vanellus* and, above all, migratory flocks of hundreds of *Calidris pugnax*, demonstrate that the Nida Delta has once again become a key stronghold for these species at the national level.

The project also delivered lasting social benefits. The development of tourist infrastructure has effectively guided visitor flows, minimizing negative pressures while simultaneously enhancing the area's appeal. These measures, combined with the continued educational mission carried out by the Umianowice Environmental Education Centre, represent the primary response to the lack of ecological knowledge identified in the SWOT analysis.

The LIFE4Delta project initiated a range of processes, some of which – such as grazing and active species conservation – will require ongoing, hands-on management to consolidate the achieved results. Others, like

natural succession in restored watercourses, have received only an initial boost and will now primarily require careful monitoring, allowing us to learn directly from nature itself. The key question concerns the guarantee of maintaining all these outcomes. The answer lies in a system built on several pillars:

- **Institutional responsibility** of ZŚiNPK as the site manager.
- **Operational self-sufficiency in key activities** (own staff and equipment for grazing and maintenance).
- Scientific oversight ensured through ongoing collaboration with IOP PAN and the University of Agriculture in Krakow.
- **Established cooperation with key partners** (Polish Waters Holding, State Forests).
- **This After-LIFE Plan**, which clearly defines tasks, responsible entities, and potential funding sources.

It is precisely this combination of tangible resources, solid partnerships, and a clearly defined plan—not a single agreement—that provides a real guarantee for the long-term sustainability of the LIFE4Delta project's legacy.