Belgium
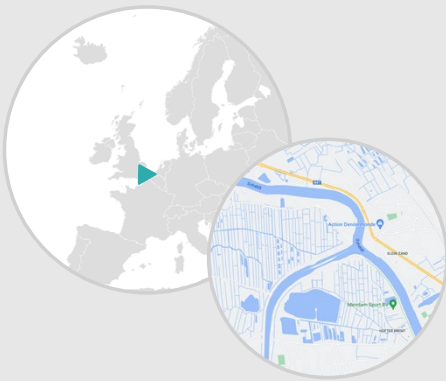
Legal Status

Nature reserve

National park scheld Valley

Habitats and Protected Species

The Meirdam area consists mainly of wet grasslands and ditches, some woods and ponds

An important habitat for numerous breeding birds: Storks, Bluethroat, Kingfisher, Silver heron, cross-banded predatory beetle, beaver and cricket

Management

Natuurpunt (NGO)

Flemish government: ANB (Agency for Nature and Forest), Flemish environmental agency (VMM), Flemish waterway

City of Dendermonde

Private owners

Polder Schelde -Durme Oost

Information sources

https://www.natuurpunt.be/pagina/blue-transition

https://www.natuurpunt.be/natuurgebied/sint-onolfspolder

https://curieuzeneuzen.be/waar-we-meten/tuin/

Meirdam

Introduction

Meirdam is a 65ha vision area within the Sint-Onolfspolder nature reserve. Natuurpunt manages or owns 20 ha of it. The area consists of a mix of former sand extraction pits, fish ponds, wet hay meadows and a few diverse woodlands including several ditches with valuable vegetation. Since 2008, the area has been zoned 'nature development & recreation' in Dendermonde's spatial implementation plan. Meirdam is located barely 1 km from the city centre, overlooking the towers of the Belfry and the Courthouse. In cooperation with the city of Dendermonde the province of East Flanders, the ANB (Agency for Nature and Forest), the polder and the regional landscape Schelde-Durme, we want to buffer extra water in the area and allow it to infiltrate. We also want to store CO_2 by adjusting the water level management, placing some weirs on the canals and strengthening the blue-green network.

Through the recently approved 'Blue transition' project, which is part of the Interreg Programme North Sea, Natuurpunt, in collaboration with several partners will create an urban wetland as a natural climate buffer in Dendermonde. The European grant programme provides a budget of 265,000 euros for the next three years.

Within the framework of the Blue transition project, together with the project partners, we can buffer extra water in the area and allow it to infiltrate, but also store CO_2 in the soil, through adapted water level management with, among other things, weirs on the canals. This is how we strengthen the blue-green network. The project also fits within a broader programme of Natuurpunt in which it aims to restore or develop urban wetlands with innovative projects in Flanders. To make Flemish cities and towns climate-robust and resistant to increasing periods of drought, heat and extreme precipitation due to climate change."

Issues & key challenges

- Countering habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation
- Restoring the water level, so extra water can be stored and the historical peat remains stay wet
- By using citizen science, creating citizen involvement and involving residents in softening and watering projects
- Using wet nature to keep the city liveable during hot summer days and also provide space for residents who do not have their own garden or green spaces available

Outcomes & benefits

- Prevention of floods through water storage and buffering peak flow events
- Prevention of droughts and optimisation of nature values through water retention
- Restoration of ecohydrological conditions
- Restoration of habitats for threatened European species
- Decrease of the heat island effect
- Citizen engagement and natural space in densely populated areas

Lessons learnt & future

- A good ecohydrological study as base for decent wetland restoration
- Upscale the project with investmens en coöperations from private partners
- Place weirs to keep the water in the canals and raise the water level in the area
- Use bridges and boats to make the parts of area accessible for nature conservation and guided walks

We will further publicise the concept of nature as a solution to climate-resilient cities and, by engaging policymakers and citizens, increase support for wetland restoration and expansion.

BLUE-GREEN SPACE

CARBON SINK

GREEN AIRCO

More info

Eurosite Factsheet
Wetlands and Climate Change
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