

NEW PUBLICATION | LIFE Sparc wraps up with a look to the future

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At the end of August, the European project LIFE Sparc will come to an end. Since 2017, this project has accelerated the development of eight Sigma Plan areas into natural climate buffers. In the new Layman's Report, LIFE Sparc looks back on the results of eight years of cooperation between local and regional authorities. Its central message: nature might be vulnerable to climate change, but it is also part of the solution.

With €2.3 million in funding from the European Union, LIFE Sparc supported the Sigma Plan from 2017 to 2025. In eight areas, space was created for mudflats and salt marshes: tidal areas that serve as **climate buffers**. This means that the high-water level during a thousand-year storm near Dendermonde can be reduced by approximately 35 centimetres.

The authentic **tidal nature** now provides a home for an increasing number of species. Rare birds such as the spotted crane, spoonbill, bluethroat, marsh harrier, purple heron and night heron have built their nests there. Various fish species, bats and even otters have also benefited from the results. "The depoldering and the creation of floodplains not only create a natural buffer against flooding," says Lieven Nachtergale (Agentschap voor Natuur en Bos), "they also increase nature's resilience to climate change. Our typical tidal nature makes use of this."

European example

Residents of the Scheldt Valley saw a vast transformation in their surroundings. Familiar landscapes made way for worksites, and then for burgeoning river nature. What's more, they got to contribute ideas and help create this river valley, that is adapting to a changing climate. The Layman's Report brings together **10 keys to achieving greater local support**, from involving children to training ambassadors. With its unique Flemish approach, LIFE Sparc even became an example for Europe, says Joris Vanlede of Flanders Hydraulics. "We were able to show colleagues from the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany and other countries how we work. In this way, LIFE Sparc had even more impact than we could have hoped for."

Climate walks, hiking routes and the STROOM festival as well as its predecessor Hoogtij gave everyone the opportunity to discover the LIFE Sparc area. The report looks ahead to the real highlight of the project: **three brand-new adventure trails**. Game elements and assignments introduce young and old to the unique characteristics of Klein Broek (Temse), Groot Schoor (Bornem) and Vlassenbroek (Dendermonde).

To be continued

Many of the LIFE Sparc initiatives will be continued under the auspice of the new Scheldt Valley National Park. "We continue to build a resilient Scheldt Valley that is ready for climate change," says project officer Bart Mels. "With the support of Tourism Flanders, we will invest in a wide range of activities with all our partners, from visitor centres to nature experiences."

The Layman's Report is intended for a wide audience. Local media are free to use the insights and images in the report to share this unique Flemish climate story with their readers.

The full publication is available free of charge via life-sparc.eu.

About the Layman's Report

The Layman's Report is a requirement for any project receiving funding from the European LIFE programme. With contributions on flood protection, tidal nature, cooperation with local partners and concrete lessons on participation, the LIFE Sparc report provides a rich overview of what the project has achieved. The publication is intended for anyone interested in nature, climate and policy, and can be shared freely.

About LIFE Sparc

The [LIFE Sparc-project](#) ran from 2017 to 2025. It focused on eight areas along the Scheldt and Durme rivers: Groot Schoor in Bornem, Vlassenbroek and Uiterdijk in Dendermonde, Wal-Zwijn, De Bunt and Groot Schoor in Hamme, and Groot and Klein Broek in Waasmunster and Temse. The project team worked together with policymakers, scientists, local entrepreneurs and volunteers to think and act in a nature-inclusive way.

About the team

[De Vlaamse Waterweg nv](#), the Flemish government agency that manages navigable waterways, created eight floodplains.

[Flanders Hydraulics](#) and the [Vermogen Flanders Hydraulics Public Agency](#) were responsible for scientific research and knowledge sharing with foreign river managers.

The [Regionaal Landschap Schelde-Durme](#) rolled out public activities for local residents and recreational users; the [Scheldt Valley National Park](#) will take over this role after the end of LIFE Sparc.

The [Agentschap voor Natuur en Bos](#) was responsible for general coordination and communication and for expertise in nature management.

Factsheet

LIFE Sparc	
Location	Zeeschelde, Flanders, Belgium
Start	01/09/2017
End	31/08/2025
Total budget	€ 8.525.800
Contribution European Union	€ 2.351.175

LIFE Sparc areas			
Dendermonde	Vlassenbroek	flood control area with reduced tides	2012-2026
	Uiterdijk	depoldering	2026
Hamme	Wal-Zwijn	flood control area with reduced tides	2010-2025
	Groot Schoor Hamme	depoldering	2007-2021
	De Bunt	flood control area with reduced tides	2008-2025
Waasmunster	Groot Broek	depoldering	2008-2024
Temse	Klein Broek	depoldering	2008-2025
Bornem	Groot Schoor Hingene	depoldering	2020-2026

For more information:

Agentschap voor Natuur en Bos

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