

Alternet sessions in SRI conference in Helsinki on 10-14 June 2024 (Alternet Day: 12 June 2024)

Theme: Alternet - bridging science, policy and society for nature restoration: challenges and future perspectives

Background: Alternet celebrates its 20th birthday this year. The network brings together international natural and social science researchers from 21 European countries to integrate our understanding of biodiversity, ecosystems, and the services they provide to society and to create a platform for meaningful communication with policy-makers and the public. This session will showcase nature restoration research carried out in this pan-European network.

With biodiversity declining despite over 30 years of conservation efforts, attention has recently turned to restoring degraded nature, alongside its preservation and sustainable use. Restoration focuses on improving the ecological status of ecosystems and implies an improvement in the conservation of biodiversity, supporting of ecosystem functions and provision of ecosystem services. In the EU Biodiversity Strategy, restoration goals range from reversing specific negative trends related to biodiversity loss (e.g., reductions in pollination), through reducing risks to biodiversity (e.g., from chemicals) to active restoration activities (e.g., planting trees, remediating polluted soils, or restoring free flowing rivers). Globally, restoration is often coupled with afforestation and wetland restoration. Alternet would be interested in proposals for talks and social engagement in the following areas, 1) the science-policy interface in nature restoration, 2) ecosystem restoration for increased biodiversity and multiple ecosystem benefits, and 3) the governance of nature restoration.

1) **Science-policy interface supporting nature restoration:** With the mounting evidence of ecosystem degradation causing biodiversity loss, a call to turn negative trends to positive has resulted in important science-policy challenges. The EU Nature Restoration Law proposal resulted in a debate which came close to gridlock in 2023. However, the European Parliament has now voted for the law to go forward after several compromises to the original Commission proposal, in particular, regarding the role of agricultural lands and peatlands. By the time of the SRI conference in June 2024, the Nature Restoration Law should be passed and will provide a timely target for analyses. We call for presentations investigating how the process of preparing the EU Nature Restoration law relied on existing knowledge about biodiversity restoration and on pre-existing knowledge-platforms and knowledge streams. What does this mean for future knowledge needs, including but not limited to monitoring and evaluation processes?

[We would like Alternet members to provide us with some presentations/content which will showcase the kinds of work being done across the network, potentially including EKLIPSE, and European projects].

2) **Ecosystem restoration for increased biodiversity and multiple ecosystem benefits:** Approaches to restoring different ecosystem types and their functions depend on both the legacies of human activities which have resulted in ecosystem degradation and the restoration objectives. For example; wetlands have been restored to improve nutrient retention, agricultural lands to manage drought risks and increase fertility, forest ecosystems to generate habitat for species relying on old-growth characteristics and reduce pest and drought risks or peatlands have been restored for climate change mitigation as well as water retention and purification. Alongside these primary justifications, numerous other ecological, social and economic benefits have been identified as motivating restoration. Restoration helps to tackle the triple planetary crises crisis: biodiversity, climate and pollution. Nexus-approaches seek to maximize synergies and minimize tradeoffs in addressing these crises and generate policy coherence. We call for presentations, including “examples of good praxes” which help to provide a knowledge-base for the effectiveness of different restoration approaches and the extent to which they are optimised for the production of multiple ecosystem benefits.

We would like Alternet members to provide us with some presentations/content which will showcase the work with younger scientists, in particular the summer school as well as welcoming presentations from alumni)

- 3) **Governance of nature restoration:** Restoration approaches range from active manipulation of ecosystems, e.g., with excavators and shovels to reductions in active management such as grazing. Coordinating and implementing such a range of actions requires changes to the current management practices and to the rights and responsibilities of different actors implementing or affected by them. Restoration may, for example, be publicly funded or carried out by NGO, citizen groups and/or funded or financed by private businesses, for a variety of motivations, ranging from reducing supply chain risk through to corporate social responsibility. This entails novel and diverse combinations of actors in teams working for restoration, each with different resources, interests, and accountabilities. These new mixes should in the long-term strengthen restoration but also highlight tensions: for example, how to fairly balance the needs of local citizens with those of corporate actors? This must be planned for both within restoration teams, and by other actors who govern it. These range from information and planning to regulation and incentives. We call for presentations that share different approaches to governance of restoration, the need for engagement with local stakeholders, and the learnings around the effectiveness, feasibility and legitimacy of these approaches.

[We would like Alternet members to provide us with some presentations/content which will showcase examples of Alternets' work within European projects such as BioAgora, focusing on the role of Alternet and how being a part of it brings value to organisations involved].