

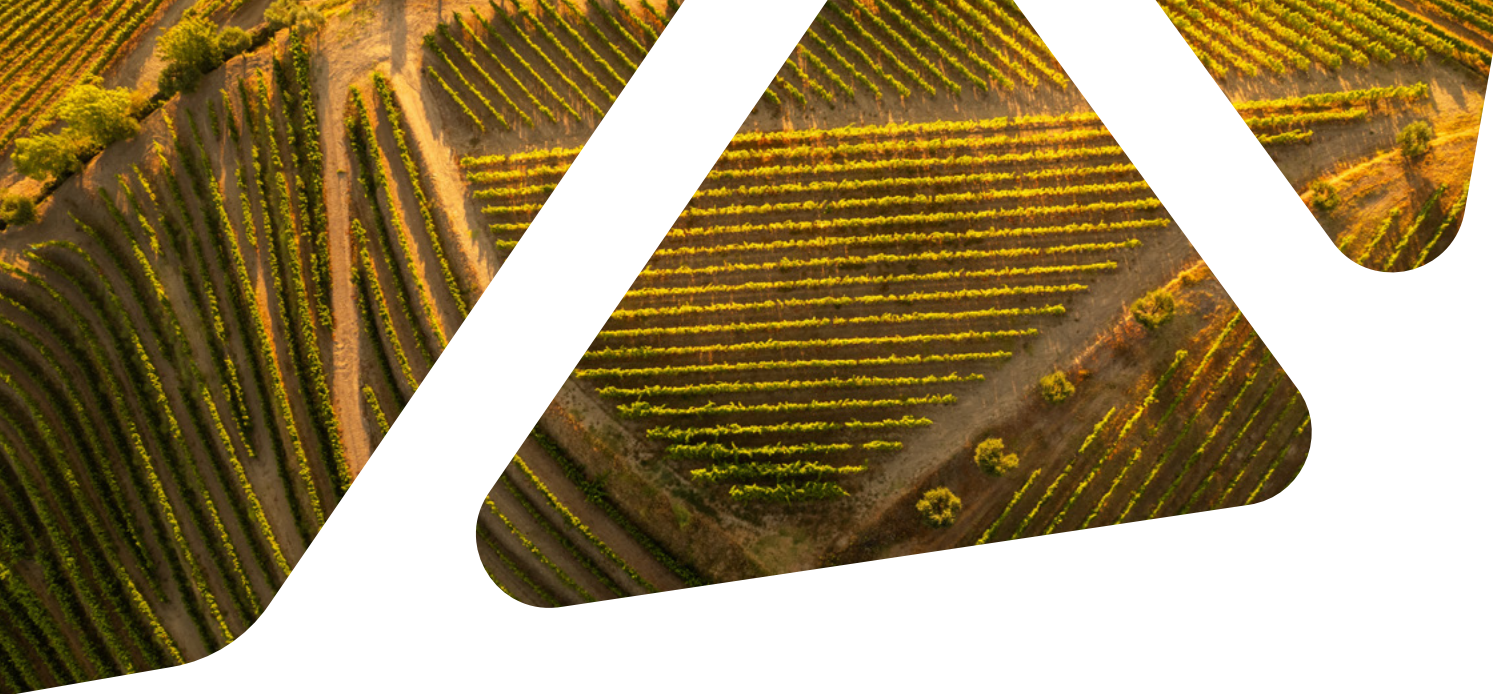


MOSAIC

What is Private Land Conservation?



Find out more at:
www.mosaic-europe.eu



Private Land Conservation is a voluntary effort to protect natural resources and biodiversity on privately owned land, working hand in hand with other regulatory conservation measures to address ecological gaps.

Private Land Conservation is a voluntary effort by individuals, corporations, or organisations to protect, restore, and sustainably manage natural resources and biodiversity on privately owned land. It focuses on stewardship of land that remains in private hands while contributing to broader environmental goals. Stewardship can be broadly defined as the responsible management of resources entrusted to one's care to ensure their sustainability and long-term value.

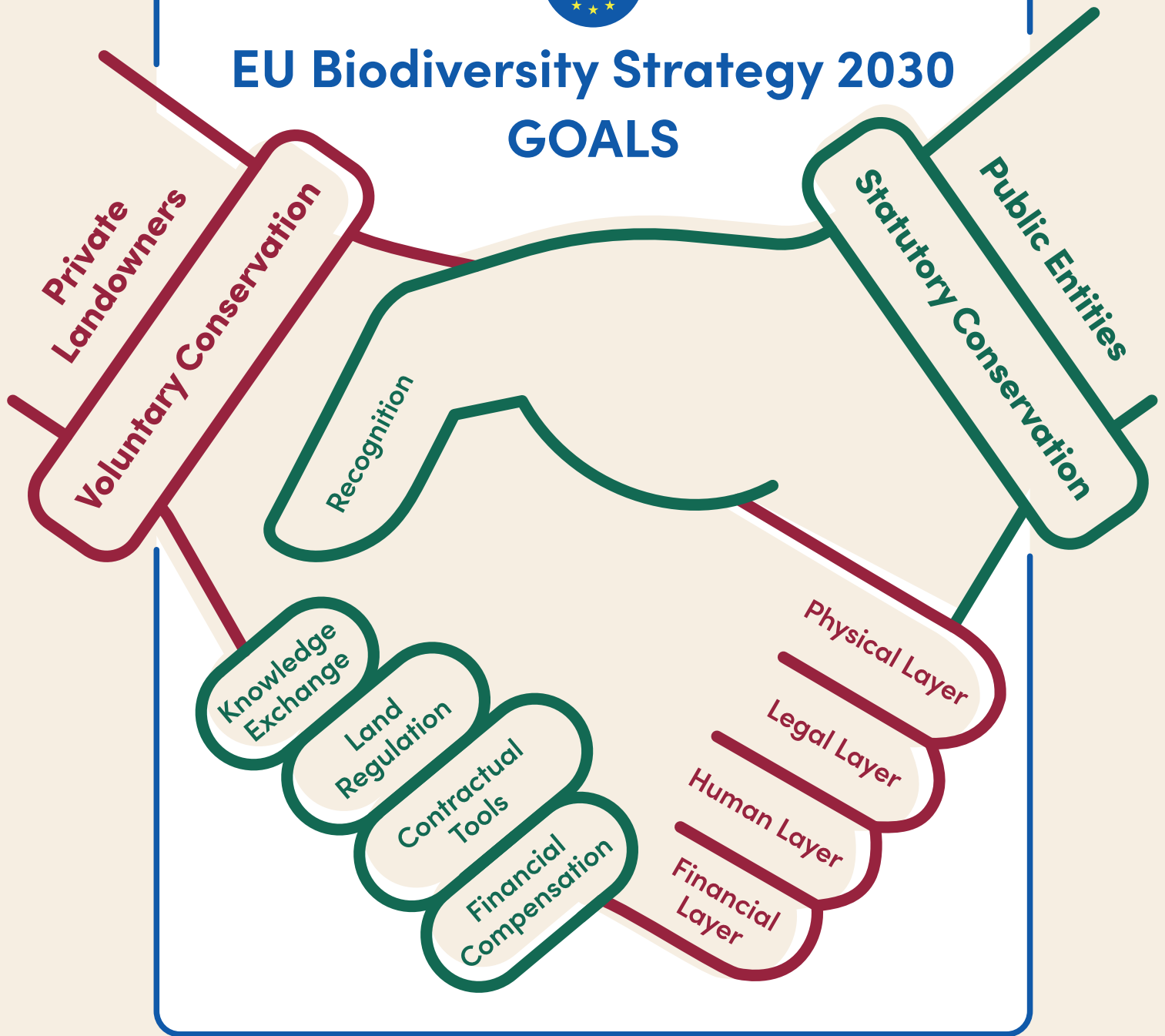
Private Land Conservation includes the protection of nature and biodiversity on a property which is already in private ownership as well as the private acquisition of a property or of use rights for conservation purposes. It excludes any initiatives to conserve nature on properties under public governance.

Conservation measures by private actors complement statutory conservation efforts by filling spatial and ecological gaps. Private Land Conservation typically involves legally binding or/and informal agreements, such as conservation easements and land stewardship agreements. Financial incentives and partnerships with land trusts or NGOs can also be used to implement Private Land Conservation. These voluntary efforts provide landowners with flexibility in meeting ecological goals while retaining ownership and rights over their lands.





EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 GOALS



THE CONCEPT

Physical Layer

Conservation as a statutory duty, which refers to conservation efforts enforced by law or regulations, includes land under public governance such as national parks, nature reserves, and protected areas.

These legally designated areas serve as critical habitats for biodiversity and play a fundamental role in environmental protection. However, conservation efforts need to go beyond areas under public governance and consider the wider landscape and its users, to meet ambitious biodiversity and climate resilience goals.

Private lands play a crucial role in bridging this gap by expanding conservation areas, maintaining ecological corridors, and fostering habitat connectivity. Voluntary Private Land Conservation is indispensable to complement statutory conservation efforts. Private landowners, NGOs, and conservation organisations contribute by implementing sustainable land management practices that enhance biodiversity while ensuring the land remains productive. Private Land Conservation Programs such as conservation easements, land stewardship agreements, and financial incentives encourage landowners to participate without the burden of restrictive mandates.

Legal Layer

The legal landscape of Private Land Conservation in Europe is a complex mosaic, as each EU Member State has their own set of regulations tied to land conservation.

But it is not always the case that such frameworks can also support Private Land Conservation. Some countries, such as Spain, already allow landowners to enter into conservation agreements with other parties. Others like Belgium and the Netherlands, already have the legal mechanisms to designate conservation statuses on private land, including Privately Protected Areas (PPAs). Thus, it is vital to ensure that formal legislation is in place to give private landowners the right tools and incentives to engage voluntarily in land conservation.





Human Layer

It comes as no surprise that humans have a very special relationship with the land they own or are culturally connected to.

Motivation to engage in Private Land Conservation depends on people who see their properties as both natural assets and environmental resources. In many cases, many landowners aim to leave their land for future generations. Others might be after the nostalgia of caring for the lands they grew up in. Whichever the reasoning leading landowners to choose to conserve nature in their lands, it is important to strike a balance between livelihood needs and ecological goals. Supporting sustainable practices, like agroforestry and eco-tourism, integrates human activities into conservation, fosters local stewardship, and creates economic benefits. This encourages conservation-friendly behaviour. Private Land Conservation can be seen as a bottom-up approach that empowers local communities and individual actors to act voluntarily, ensuring that conservation is equitable and aligns with the wider societal and economic objectives.

Financial Layer

To enable meaningful participation in private land conservation, private landowners need access to robust financial tools and fair compensation mechanisms that recognise both their stewardship role and the opportunity costs of conservation.

These tools should include conservation easements, tax incentives, direct payments for ecosystem services, and access to reliable carbon/nature or biodiversity credit markets.

Such mechanisms help landowners protect their income streams while preserving the ecological integrity of their land. By valuing and monetizing the ecosystem services they provide — such as clean water, carbon sequestration, and biodiversity — these tools can align conservation goals with economic sustainability, making long-term protection of natural resources a viable and attractive option. Unfortunately, these financial tools and compensation mechanisms are not yet fully developed or widely accessible, highlighting a critical need for improved policy frameworks and investment to support private landowners in conservation efforts.

EXAMPLES OF PRIVATE LAND CONSERVATION

Land Stewardship Schemes (fixed time-period)

Land stewardship in the EU is a voluntary, trust-based framework that promotes sustainable land management through collaboration between landowners and conservation organisations. It is not a single legal tool, but a flexible approach that uses various instruments — such as informal agreements, financial incentives, and technical guidance — to support nature-friendly practices alongside productive land use. While these agreements are often not legally binding, their adaptability makes them effective in diverse local contexts. However, their success relies on ongoing cooperation and support, which can be a challenge without formal legal enforcement.

The Land Stewardship Scheme is different from the concept “Land stewardship”, which is a broad and philosophical idea about responsible, sustainable land management with a vision for the long-term. While the concept provides a guiding principle, the scheme offers practical steps and measurable actions to achieve conservation goals in the short-term.

Privately Protected Areas (PPAs)

PPAs are areas voluntarily designated for conservation. This process involves creating a management plan that outlines conservation goals, activities, and monitoring protocols.

Practices like habitat restoration and invasive species control are implemented, or activities such as development or resource extraction are restricted to protect the land’s ecological value. Ongoing monitoring is required to track progress, and reports to relevant authorities submitted to ensure compliance. Long-term conservation is secured, often in perpetuity, with succession planning and potential endowments or funds to support management. The landowner retains full ownership and control of the land.



Conservation Easements

Conservation easements are permanent legal agreements between landowners and conservation organisations or government bodies, in which landowners agree to restrict certain land rights and uses — such as development or intensive farming — to protect the environment. These agreements are tailored to each property’s ecological value and the landowner’s goals, and they are binding even if the land is sold. In return, landowners may receive financial incentives like tax breaks or payments. While widely used in the U.S., conservation easements are still emerging in Europe and may require legal reforms and broader awareness to be fully effective. When well-implemented, they provide a lasting balance between private property rights and public conservation objectives.

To Conclude...

Voluntary land conservation efforts create a landscape-scale approach to biodiversity protection, increasing resilience against climate change and environmental degradation. By integrating private land into conservation networks, Europe and other regions can ensure more robust, adaptable, and community-driven conservation models that benefit both nature and society.

WHY DO WE NEED PRIVATE LAND CONSERVATION NOW RATHER THAN LATER?

The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 highlights the urgent need to protect and restore nature across Europe. Achieving the strategy's ambitious goals, such as restoring degraded ecosystems and increasing biodiversity-friendly land use, requires the engagement of private landowners.

Since a significant portion of Europe's most biologically rich mosaic of land is privately owned, Private Land Conservation is a crucial component of a comprehensive conservation strategy. Without the inclusion of private lands, essential ecological processes such as species migration, habitat connectivity, and climate adaptation could be disrupted, accentuating biodiversity loss and ecosystem fragmentation and/or degradation.

There is a strong case to be made for Private Land Conservation as an essential tool to complement formally designated protected areas. This will ensure that conservation efforts extend across the wider landscape rather than being confined to designated areas.



Private Land Conservation in Action

In 2018, the concept of Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) was formally defined under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Decision 14/8 as:

“a geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values.”

While these areas are not managed primarily for biodiversity conservation, they can bring tangible conservation benefits alongside their primary objective, retaining the economic viability of land and delivering biodiversity as a by-product. An example are agricultural grasslands, which despite serving their primary goal of grain production, when sustainably managed, can be host to a number of species.

OECMs recognise the voluntary contribution of Private Land Conservationists to achieve biodiversity outcomes in the long term, and could be key to support landowners wishing to contribute. These efforts accumulate to contribute towards the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030.

Statutory and voluntary conservation efforts must work hand in hand to achieve lasting environmental protection. Collaborative initiatives between public agencies and private landowners, significantly amplify conservation impact.

By formally recognizing conservation efforts on private land, OECMs validate the public goods these landowners provide and offer reassurance that their investments in nature are both supported and protected.

They also demonstrate that productive land management and biodiversity conservation are not mutually exclusive.

A well-defined OECM framework could enhance the legitimacy of conservation easements and similar tools by granting them legal recognition for the duration of their agreements. This would help unlock the full potential of private land conservation in meeting biodiversity targets.

Additionally, such recognition can serve as a valuable marketing asset, enabling landowners to access emerging natural capital markets, including carbon and biodiversity credits.

There is no need to reinvent the wheel: mechanisms such as Private Land Conservation agreements, the Wildlife Estates Label, and several other existing initiatives already align closely with OECM criteria. These provide a strong foundation to build upon and offer a key opportunity to formally recognize and support well-functioning, established conservation networks.

LANDOWNER PERSPECTIVE & ATTACHMENT TO LAND

The Personal Bond: Unlocking the Potential of Private Land Conservation

Understanding landowners' motivations is vital for effective conservation. Many view their land as more than just property — it is a generational legacy deeply tied to memories, identity, and a sense of duty. This personal connection fosters a responsibility to preserve and enhance the land, not just for financial benefits, but for its intrinsic value, ensuring land remains intact for future generations.

Aligning Conservation with Landowners' Values

Conservation efforts must acknowledge and respect these deeply rooted emotional ties. Programs that align with landowners' values — emphasising stewardship, sustainable management, and their role as custodians of nature — will be far more successful. When landowners see conservation as a means of enhancing the legacy of their land rather than a restriction on their rights, they are far more likely to engage. While financial incentives and community support are essential, real motivation comes from the sense of purpose and responsibility that conservation fosters, turning landowners into active partners in protecting ecosystems.

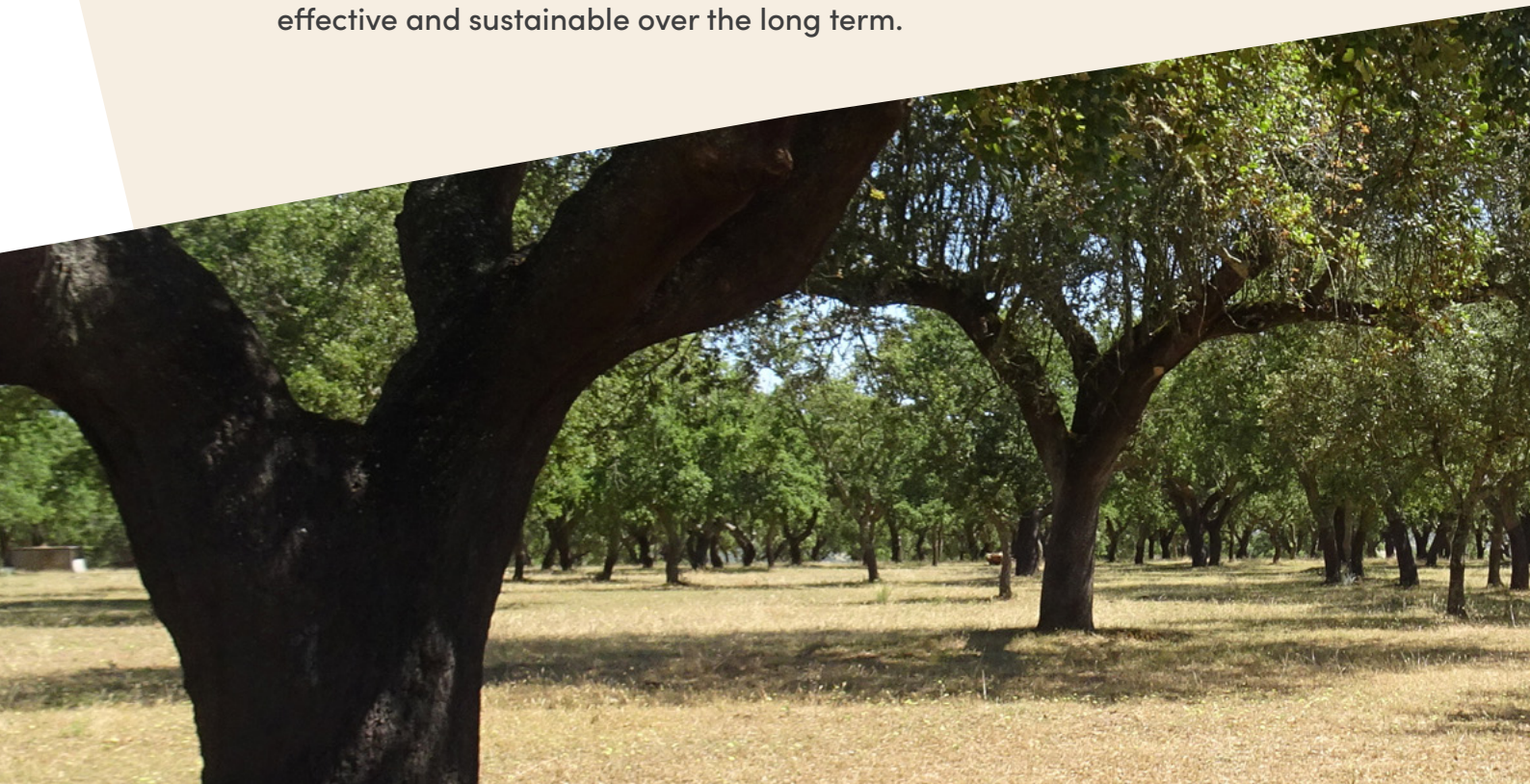


Public and Private Cooperation

The synergy between public and private conservation efforts is vital. Joint initiatives leverage the strengths of both sectors, combining public funding and policy support with private innovation and stewardship. Programs like public-private partnerships (PPPs) create frameworks for cooperation, ensuring that resources are used efficiently and conservation goals are met. This cooperation also fosters a sense of shared responsibility, uniting stakeholders in the mission to protect the planet's natural heritage. By conserving and restoring natural habitats on working lands, landowners contribute to biodiversity, enhance ecosystem services such as pollination, water regulation, and carbon sequestration, and build resilience to climate impacts without compromising agricultural productivity.

THE CHALLENGE AND AIM OF MOSAIC

Urgent and well-informed land-use policies and practices are essential if Europe is to achieve its sustainability goals. Building on the outcomes of the LIFE ENPLC and LIFE LandIsForever projects, and learning from international experiences through the collaboration with the International Land Conservation Network (ILCN), MOSAIC continues the mission to support private land conservation across Europe. Through the MOSAIC Policy Labs, we are supporting the development of land-use policies that will achieve shared objectives for both the climate and biodiversity. MOSAIC's mission is to work with practitioners, researchers, and policy makers to develop new policy tools and insights that will be used to steer the future of land use in support of European sustainability objectives. We want a future where land-use policies and practices contribute to Europe's sustainability goals. Private Land Conservation serves as an essential tool for enhancing biodiversity and ecosystem resilience. While the current model of protected area designation is vital for the conservation of high biodiversity value areas, it alone cannot meet all ecological and societal needs. A significant portion of Europe's most biologically diverse land is privately owned, meaning that private landowners must be recognised and actively engaged in conservation efforts to achieve comprehensive environmental goals. This would not only help conserve natural habitats but also support the economic viability of conserved privately owned lands, ensuring that conservation efforts are both effective and sustainable over the long term.



Project Partners

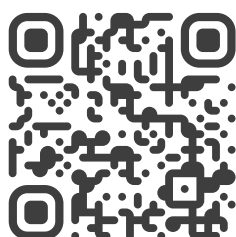


IN A NUTSHELL

Private Land Conservation is the voluntary effort by landowners to preserve and enhance the ecological values of their land. It involves practices ranging

from habitat restoration and biodiversity protection to sustainable resource use and stewardship.

Unlike conservation efforts relying on governmental oversight, Private Land Conservation is driven by individual or organisational initiative. It can take many forms, including legally binding agreements like conservation easements, collaborations with land trusts, or participation in ecosystem service markets. At its core, Private Land Conservation recognises that environmental stewardship is a shared responsibility and that private lands play a critical role in achieving global biodiversity and sustainability goals. Through partnerships, incentives, and innovation, private landowners become integral players in shaping a sustainable future for all.



MOSAIC is an EU-funded project working to understand and influence how land-use across Europe is managed.

www.mosaic-europe.eu

www.linkedin.com/company/mosaiclanduse



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