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Book of Abstracts

Editors:

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Lost in translation: from monitoring in the field to policy evaluation

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In northwestern Europe, atmospheric nitrogen deposition is one of the pressures for habitat restoration. The Dutch government introduced the Integrated Approach to Nitrogen (PAS), allowing future nitrogen reduction to justify permits. In 2019, the Council of State ruled PAS invalid, triggering the 'nitrogen crisis,' which restricted economic development unless nitrogen effects were mitigated. In response, the Netherlands launched the Nitrogen Reduction and Nature Improvement program in 2021, which includes monitoring and evaluation of the effects of nitrogen reduction and nature restoration measures. However, this evaluation turned out to not be so easy. Monitoring effects of restoration measures is quite complex as they occur on different spatial and time scales and differ depending on the type of measures taken. The Netherlands is known for its extensive monitoring data, but it is collected (opportunistically) following varying protocols, often without baseline measurements, not long-term or inconsistently over time. This information is scattered across various documents and databases, and data on the same metric—for example the area of a specific habitat type—can differ between sources. There is a risk of 'shifting baselines' as policymakers, under pressure to meet targets, may gradually redefine what is considered 'good quality' in nature restoration and ecological effects are usually visible on different time scales than policy is made. Since nature restoration involves customization in different areas, extrapolating from site-specific data to a national or EU level proves to be particularly challenging. A considerable amount of information gets 'lost in translation' between the diverse worlds of nature conservationists who focus on practical aspects and customize management to the field situation, and policy officials who require a clear and consistent overview to account for spent subsidies. This leads to the conservation status of Natura 2000 areas becoming a 'virtual reality,' essentially existing only on paper.

Poster presentation