

Hainaut Cross-border Nature Park

Book of
actions



Parc naturel
transfrontalier
du Hainaut



- 
- Our landscape over time**
Learn how to observe our living environment
 - Let's take a walk in the Nature Parks**
Hiking trails for everyone
 - Towards cross-border eco-citizenship**
Environmental education
 - Coordinated water management**
Diversified, sustainable use
 - Let's approach our living areas differently**
Towards adapted territorial management
 - Encountering farmers**
Towards more autonomous production methods
 - Let's discover all aspects of the territory**
A program of excursions, events and festivities
 - A cultural approach to the territory**
What if we worked together on an artistic adventure?
 - Towards a sustainable wood-energy structure**
Developing local resources
 - The return of orchards**
Let's learn how to plant and care for our fruit trees
 - Let's consume locally and in season!**
For ethics, quality and proximity
 - Managing sites of biological interest**
Let's increase local biodiversity

Our landscape over time

Learn how to observe our living environment

The Hainaut Cross-border Nature Park's landscape is an attractive living environment for more than 250 000 inhabitants and many visitors. The territory is a mosaic of diverse landscapes that makes a fine sampling of what the region has to offer: a blend of wet plains, farming plateaus and mining sites.

The scenery changes with the seasons as well as according to human activity. It is essential to follow their evolution in order to understand how everyone's daily behavior (elected officials, economic players, inhabitants...) influences the territory and to shed some light on future choices for territorial development.

To assist us, we have set up a tool, among others: **A cross-border landscape photographic observatory.** It enables us to observe landscape evolution thanks to the photography technique of photographing the same scene at different times. The tool is available to anyone who would like to understand the landscapes within the Hainaut Cross-border Nature Park.

The objective of the tool is to increase awareness and motivate inhabitants and visitors to become "actors" in the landscape at an individual level. The tool will encourage people to observe, learn, understand and act. Increased awareness requires discussion, shared experiences and ideas and the transmission of knowledge.

The cross-border landscape photographic observatory is a learning tool as well as a means for analysis and mobilization that provides for:

- improved understanding of landscapes, monitoring of transformations and changes in the landscape through observation of several sites in order to illustrate the territory and what it becomes.
- sustainable citizen engagement.
- management and help in decision-making concerning landscape policy issues.

This tool is available to all audiences: citizens who would like to discover the landscape, its history and evolution, technicians, elected officials, inhabitants, professionals, students and educators...

www.observatoire-paysages.pnth.eu

A website where you can see photo campaigns and understand the overall approach. It encourages interactivity and you will find all of the Observatory's news, actions taken with the inhabitants such as the exhibit, "Notre Paysage, c'est celui qu'on se construit" (Our landscape is the one that we build), the "Parrainez un paysage" (Adopt a landscape) campaign, the collection of old documents and much more information.



Let's take a walk in the Nature Parks

Hiking trails for everyone

There are nearly **1 000 km of trails** where you can wander from one side of the Franco-Belgian border to the other.

The **cross-border network of hiking and excursion trails** is very appealing, first of all because it is an integral part of the region (the network is used by inhabitants for their daily travel), and it has tourist appeal (beneficial for discovering the Nature Parks' heritage), as well as an ecological function (it is a refuge area and a corridor for local fauna and flora) and finally, because of its cross-border position, it has a blend of cultures.

The current objective is not to increase the number of hiking trails, but to build and maintain a quality network. It is important to make our trails more appealing and easier to understand for optimum public use. There are numerous markings along the trails and booklets to help discover the main elements of the territory's heritage, such as the mining heritage, remarkable trees, multiple swamps, ponds and streams, as well as chapels.

All of the **hiking and educational trails** are marked on the hiking and biking maps published by the Hainaut Cross-border Nature Park, in addition to more detailed "hiking sheets" for each itinerary, whether for horses, pedestrians or bikes and they may be downloaded at www.pnr-scarpe-escout.fr and www.plainesdelescaut.be.

Hiking for everyone

Since 2010, the Nature Park has two **joëlettes**® that are available free of charge thanks to a grant to communes, associations and individuals who would like to discover the territory's natural resources while hiking. Joëlettes® are off-road wheel chairs with a single wheel that enable motor-impaired persons (seniors or physically impaired) to hike along a trail accompanied by two people (one in front, one in back).



© David Delecourt

Towards cross-border eco-citizenship

Environmental education



© Samuel Dhote

We are convinced that the discovery of nature and nurturing respect for nature is learned at a very young age and the Hainaut Cross-border Nature Park has educational facilities that organize **animations** for students and **workshops** during school holidays to stimulate children's curiosity as well as to create environmental awareness starting at the age of 3. **"Ecosystems without borders"** learning days have been set up. They combine practical and fun activities. Belgian and French "nature" instructors animate these learning days, bringing together a French and Belgian class. The objective is to show them that the ecosystems on both sides of the border are the same and that everything is linked. The formula creates emulation between the Belgian and French students and teachers to act in favor of the territory's ecosystems.



© Samuel Dhote

A child's view of our landscapes

Every year, the two parks call for school projects to encourage and support classes to help them discover the cross-border territory, to understand it and to act! Teachers benefit from educational help, activities and adapted tools to work on their class project. Every year, there are two or three themes that correspond to the challenges facing the cross-border park territory and they can be used to develop awareness for the environment and sustainable development. The Hainaut Cross-border Nature Park offers a teaching guide as well as tools from the photographic landscape observatory to involve children in shared knowledge about our landscapes.

Coordinated water management

Diversified, sustainable use



© Samuel Dhote

The Hainaut Cross-border Nature Park's natural environment and landscapes have been largely shaped by water in many forms. While the Escaut and Scarpe rivers are the territory's main backbone, there are many streams (some of them act as the border), old navigation canals, canals, ditches, swamps and wet lands that add to the wealth of the cross-border territory's heritage.

They are shelter for fauna and flora that live in and around aquatic environments (fish, invertebrates, amphibians, algae, moss, birds...). The landscape's relief and valleys were sculpted by the particularly dense hydrographic network. Waterways are used for water sports and recreation, as well as for fishing and hunting. Navigable waterways are important for the economy and used for commercial and tourist transportation.

The whole is managed and developed according to their different functions and it forms what is called the damp and aquatic sector's biological integrity in the Park's Charter.

The Hainaut Cross-border Nature Park strongly invests in the management and restoration of these environments, the inventory of damp areas, the creation of ponds, and the promotion of adapted management...

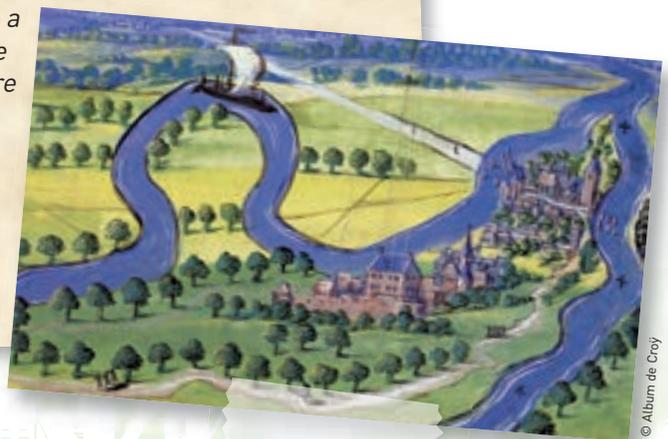
It actively participates in planning and developing tools created according to European directive-frameworks for water with the objectives of preventing and reducing pollution, the promotion of sustainable water use, environmental protection, improving the state of aquatic ecosystems and mitigating the impact of flooding and drought.

In this way, the SAGE (Schéma d'aménagement et de gestion des eaux) Scarpe Aval (F) and the Contrat de Rivière Escaut-Lys (B) bring together the actors who are involved and mobilized for these projects.

Our waterways tell our history...

The Hainaut Cross-border Nature Park is involved in a historical study of two waterways in the territory: the Grande Ruisselle in Belgium and the Grande Traitoire in France.

The various developments during history to dry and manage a damp territory influenced both sides of the border. The historic journey helps us better understand today's landscape and use the past as a guide for better coordinated management.



© Album de Croy

Let's approach our living areas differently

Towards adapted territorial management

Adapted management means maintaining and taking care of the territory in a different way. It involves both natural environments (damp areas, forests...), man-made environments such as green spaces in urban areas (along roads, traffic circles, gardens, parks...) and individual private gardens. It means sustainably managing these areas with a concern for ecology, economy and society based on required needs.

Adapted management is more respectful of the environment and it encourages certain actions. The best-known example is late mowing. It means allowing vegetation to develop long after the end of spring, even summer. It is often done in areas that do not require regular maintenance and areas that are not used very often. Other examples would be:

- planting flowered prairies,
- collecting rainwater,
- manually collecting mowing waste,
- mechanical weed-removal,
- mulching planted beds in order to reduce weed development...

Adapted management also contributes to greater diversity in the flora and fauna of areas that are maintained and used by humans as well as improved water quality.

The Nature Park's ambition is to increase adapted management actions in the territory, in particular through experimentation. The idea is to encourage town maintenance departments, managers as well as the population to gradually change their ways of thinking.

What if we all became "eco-gardeners"?

Adapted management can cross over old walls as well, making natural, insect-repellent free private gardens, conservatory orchards, the use of bird houses, insect shelters... Everyone can contribute at home, taking care of their garden or orchard in a different way. In order to mobilize the population and provide practical solutions, a new network, called "écos-jardins du PNTH" (eco-gardens in the Hainaut Cross-border Nature Park) was recently created; it is open to all gardeners, both experts and beginners.



© Samuel Dhote



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Encountering farmers

Towards more autonomous production methods

How can we move towards more autonomous and more economical production systems? Can we rebuild an efficient fodder system based on our prairie grass? Is it possible to improve our protein autonomy? These are central concerns for farmers in the Hainaut Cross-border Nature Park. In order to try to find some answers, special days, "**Journées techniques autour de l'herbe**" (**Technical days about grass**) are set up to reflect on the questions.

The maintenance and valorization of territorial prairies is a major challenge for the Hainaut Cross-border Nature Park. Initiative actions demonstrate that their optimization is beneficial both to environmental conservation and economic profit. The Nature Park, in partnership with the Chamber of Agriculture of the Nord and the GNIS (Groupement National Interprofessionnel des semences et plants), organizes themed half-day sessions based on the nutritional value of grass, the optimization of prairies, protein self-sufficiency, barn drying, in order to increase awareness among farmers about the benefits of the pasture system and to help them in their reflection.

These half-days have the objective of allowing farmers to meet professionals from the animal health and farm technique sectors as well as other farmers to learn and share skills and knowledge and to work together to identify the basis for optimal prairie management. There is no doubt that exchanged information and transmission of experience during these group work sessions is an enriching experience for all.

Farmers, associations, elected officials and technicians work together to increase awareness of sustainable farming in the Hainaut Cross-border Nature Park. It helps maintain a dynamic rural economy while reducing our impact on the environment. Therefore, we maintain a quality environment that encourages human contact.

Let's taste our prairies

*In 2010, the program, "**Goûtons nos prairies**" (**Let's taste our prairies**) was developed to introduce these themes to the general public. The purpose was to increase awareness about consuming local products, to have the public taste the quality of products from our prairies, and to show consumers that their food choices can shape our landscape. On the program: farm visits, hikes around the prairies, special menus suggested by restaurants...*



© Samuel Dhote

Let's discover all aspects of the territory

A program of excursions, events and festivities

The Hainaut Cross-border Nature Park participates in many events that take place within its territory. The Nature Park has **exhibit stands and animations** available for organizers and towns during local festivities. The stands are in the form of expositions and technicians and instructor/guides from the Nature Park also participate with suggestions for numerous activities.

Inhabitants and visitors alike can have a closer look at the missions and actions that take place in the territory. Partners work with experts, giving advice while remaining open to exchanging experience. Children enjoy "playing grown-ups" while using scientific equipment (microscopes, binocular magnifiers,...) and making things with multiple materials (branches, paper, leaves from trees,...) and adults take advantage of these moments to learn new tricks and tips to use and do at home.

There are things to please everyone: stories, music, photography, tasting farm products, painting, cooking! **The Hainaut Cross-border Nature Park has excursions** that combine nature and culture during pleasant weather. There are about ten excursions that start in each territory of the two Belgian and French Nature Parks that cross the border with no problem. They are part of the panel of European activities that include the night of the owls and the night of the bats.

*A calendar of the
Park's cross-border
excursions!*

*You will find all of the excursions in the
Hainaut Cross-border Nature Park's cross-
border excursion calendar on the website
www.pnr-scarpe-escaut.fr.*



© Samuel Dhore



A cultural approach to the territory

What if we worked together on an artistic adventure?

A different approach to the territory...In partnership with cross-border actors in culture, the Hainaut Cross-border Nature Park would like to contribute to the development and dissemination of an artistic creation involving inhabitants, valorizing the territory's heritage and sustainable resources with the set up of an approach to support projects. It is called "**Aventures artistiques**" (Artistic adventures) and relies on both the skills and know-how of local cultural actors and elected officials as well as the Nature Park's capacity for mediation.

The adventures address associations, towns, inter-communities and groups of inhabitants with cultural projects in plastic and visual arts, living presentations or public readings by an artist or a professional theatrical company.

The Nature Park creates and disseminates **expositions**. Whether itinerant or temporary, the expositions cover the entire territory. They are free and the themes spotlight heritage. They may be entirely created in-house or with other artists. In that case, the Nature Park ensures the expositions' installation and removal. Organization for the vernissage and communication (mailing invitations, posters, cards...) for the presented works are included in the signed agreement with the artist.

The basic desire is to bring together different genres: photography, painting, plastic art works, sculptures...and to invite each one to enter into new universes.



© Samuel Dhote

"Saulles" (Willows) by Jean-Jacques Stenven



© Jean-Jacques Stenven (dessin)

The Hainaut Cross-border Nature Park offered an artistic view of this tree, the emblem of the territory. Sketched by the artist, originally from Flines-les-Râches in 1950, the drawings reveal the different facets of the willow whose emblematic silhouette streaks across the damp, country landscapes of our regions on both sides of the border.

Towards a sustainable wood-energy structure

Developing local resources

Adopting sustainable energies means **valorizing local resources** (wood, wind, sun, agricultural by-products...) and avoiding import of combustibles. Their use has a limited impact on the environment, in particular on the greenhouse effect in comparison to other energy sources. In the case of biomass (all organic materials of vegetal and animal origin), the results for CO₂ emissions from combustion are compensated by CO₂ absorption during a plant's entire life cycle.

The Nature Park installed an automatic wood-burning furnace (blocks) in the Maison du Parc in Bon-Secours. Between 2010 and 2012, the Nature Park consumed 20 to 30 tons of wood blocks made from silver willows on the territory. The operation saved on gas use which is twice as expensive as wood per kWh. The park hopes to set up a **local sector for the use of silver willows**. It is all good for biodiversity, landscape maintenance, the energy bill to a certain extent, and even for maintaining local employment.

Therefore, the association of farmers and members of the CUMA du Jard, along with the Hainaut Cross-border Nature Park and the regional federation of the CUMA (Coopératives d'Utilisation de Matériel Agricole), have shown that it is possible to structure a sustainable wood-energy sector locally. Silver willows were pruned and their wood was transformed into blocks to feed a community furnace. Work time, costs, volume, quality...the experimental project's profitability was measured over a period of several months in order to evaluate the economic profitability of another local sector. Other projects for community furnaces could take inspiration from this action and should emerge soon.

The sector is picking up speed with a project to structure a Société Coopérative d'Intérêt Collectif (cooperative community-oriented enterprise), grouping community and private partners to work together to increase development of community furnaces as well as storage platforms throughout the territory.



© Mathieu Franquin/PNRSE

The silver willow reintroduced

The silver willow is the Nature Park's emblem, a "do everything tree" that is providential in our rural areas. Thus, it provides wood for heat; it can be used to make fence posts, handles for tools, as well as for basket-making or weaving and serves as a refuge for local biodiversity. For several years, the Nature Park has led a program for planting and pruning willows so that these special trees will thrive in our countryside and continue to shape the Nature Park's landscape.

The return of orchards

Let's learn how to plant and care for our fruit trees

In addition to the fact that it is a pleasure for everyone to eat their own produce, orchards are genuine **living environments** for local fauna and flora as well as a part of our heritage and know-how.

A multitude of birds, generally dependent on forests and groves, like chaffinches, great tits, redstarts, European starlings, green finches, Eurasian tree sparrows, frequently nest in orchards. There are even some rare and protected species such as noble chafers (coleoptera), hermit beetles (scarabeus) or little owls (nocturnal birds of prey).

The hollows and ridges on the trunks of old fruit trees are also favorite hiding places for other animals such as bats, dormice...as well as for much smaller fauna: insects or myriapods (such as centipedes) which also serve as a rich food source for orchard birds. The diversity of fruit trees also attracts many pollinating insects like bees, butterflies and bumblebees when the orchards are in bloom.



© Samuel Dhote

In order to maintain and protect these precious allies for biodiversity, the Nature Park teaches how to **create and maintain orchards** or isolated fruit trees. Many free training sessions have been held over the past years throughout the Hainaut Cross-border Nature Park's territory. Individuals have opened the doors to their orchards in order to enrich the program and to show specific cases to participants. The training sessions are open to all: inhabitants, beginners, experts, orchard owners as well as enthusiasts. They emphasize old and local varieties and invite participants to discover fruits that we have not seen on our tables for a long time.

Finally, it is an occasion to recreate social ties with the set up of community orchards that are accessible to a larger number of people.

Preserving local heritage...

In order to make up for the massive disappearance of orchards that began in the 1950s, conservatory orchards have been planted and they favor old and local varieties. The Hainaut Cross-border Nature Park has recently planted a conservatory orchard in Rongy. It was developed in partnership with the Centre de Recherches Agronomiques de Gembloux (CRA-W), the nurseries in Lesdain and the Centre régional de Ressources Génétiques de Villeneuve d'Ascq, to perpetuate valuable know-how.



© PNPE

Let's consume locally and in season!

For ethics, quality and proximity

Local, short-cycle consumption reduces transportation, provides better remuneration to the producer since there are fewer go-betweens and creates a trusting relationship. When we buy directly from the producer, we learn how to better recognize products and growing and production methods and we effectively support the local economy and we show respect for the environment.

The Nature Park's territory includes **many producers** and among them, many small producers who are committed to preserving ancestral know-how and traditions. Thus, you can find all types of products, products for daily consumption such as dairy products, butter, fruit juices, meat and vegetables, as well as more specific products such as beer, cold cuts, waffles, jellies and jams, chocolates, etc.

In order to **valorize these resources and encourage local and seasonal consumption**, the Nature Park participates in setting up different actions suggested by producers, the population and other actors in the territory: farm markets, partnerships with grocery stores, tasting areas, animations for schools, cooking workshops, visits to farms, participation in the "quinzaine du goût" (two weeks for tasting), partnerships with cafeterias, etc. The list of actions and initiatives is long and of course, the Nature Park practices what it preaches on a daily basis by offering local products at each one of its events. The intent is to truly consider local products as "hometown" products! In the same way as historical or natural heritage, agri-food and culinary heritage must be protected.

A booklet to guide you

Meats, yoghurts, fruits, vegetables, cheeses...so many daily products that we can find two minutes from home, without spending a fortune! In order to help you with your purchases, the Nature Park has published a booklet of producers with a number of (good) addresses of producers, farmers or food processors who have a point of sale in the territory.



© Samuel Dhote

Managing sites of biological interest

Let's increase local biodiversity

Let's not wait until animal and vegetal species appear on the endangered list to act! That does not mean that we want to go back to the old days or that we no longer want to "move" because we have to conserve nature... Today natural environments have to be approached taking into account humans, beyond borders. Let's discover together that conservation is synonymous with action...

Managing a natural environment means restoring it, enhancing it, developing the natural environment thanks to human action, with respect for the spontaneous evolution of the site. That enables us to conserve, even enrich, **local natural heritage** (damp areas...), remarkable heritage (silver willows, mining heaps...), classified heritage (natural reserves, Natura 2000 sites...).

The Nature Park manages many sites on its territory. They are often called by a place name or an owner's name. We think that it is important to maintain oral tradition for terms, sometimes in dialect, to represent the "soul" of these areas and their local belonging.

These areas have remarkable natural heritage wealth. Thanks to the Nature Park's action, rare species have been able to be inventoried again and are conserved.

Most of the sites belong to communities, individuals or companies who wanted us to manage their plots: an agreement was signed with each of the parties. These "biodiversity centers" are cornerstones in the Hainaut Cross-border Nature Park's ecological structure.



© L. Mignaux/MEEDDM



© PNRSE

A cross-border work site in Hergnies

Although the Vergne river separates Wiers from Hergnies, and therefore Belgium from France, a cross-border work site with volunteers, local inhabitants, members of associations and technicians has erased the borderline. During the day, participants work on both sides of the site mowing, topping willow trees and profiling a cliff to encourage bank swallows to nest.





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