



LIFE Project Number
LIFE13NAT/EE/000082

Progress Report I
Covering the project activities from 11/05/2015 to /30/04/2016

Reporting Date
30/04/2016

LIFE+ PROJECT NAME or Acronym
LIFE TO ALVARS

Data Project

Project location	ESTONIA
Project start date:	01/09/2014
Project end date:	01/09/2019
Total budget	3,725,865 €
EC contribution:	2,791,305 €
(%) of eligible costs	74.92 %

Data Beneficiary

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1. List of abbreviations

EB – Environmental Board (coordinating beneficiary);
 CB - coordinating beneficiary;
 UT – University of Tartu (associated beneficiary);
 EULS – Estonian University of Life Sciences (associated beneficiary);
 ESCCA – Estonian Seminatural Communities Conservation Association (associated beneficiary);
 PM – project manager;
 SFMC – State Forest Management Centre.

2. Executive summary

2.1 General progress.

The general progress of the project is illustrated below. Symbol “X” refers to the years when the tasks under certain actions are planned to be implemented in case of tasks with continuous character or if the result is not countable or the total result is countable but its numerical advancement is not determined in the project schedule.

ACTION		Total Planned	Status 30/04/16	Planned 2014	Planned 2015	Planned 2016	Planned 2017	Planned 2018	Planned 2019
A	Preparatory actions, elaboration of management plans and/or action plans:								
1.	Preparation of agreements with farmers	25-75	40	0	25	0-50			
C	Concrete conservation actions:								
1	Restoration of the habitat (ha)	2500	549	0	500	1000	500	500	
2	Re-introduction of grazing (ha)	2500	500	0	500	1000	500	500	
	Building fences (km)	376	55	0	75	151	75	75	
	Portable shelters	47	8	0	10	17	10	10	
3	Re-construction of access roads (km)	45	In progress	0	10	25	10		
4	Restoration of habitat through seed sowing (ha)	4,5	In progress	0	1	1,5	1	1	
D	Monitoring of the impact of the project actions								
1	Biodiversity monitoring (site)	12	12	0	12			12	12
2	Restoration success monitoring	1	In progress	X	X	X	X	X	

ACTION		Total Planned	Status 30/04/16	Planned 2014	Planned 2015	Planned 2016	Planned 2017	Planned 2018	Planned 2019
3	Socio-economic monitoring	1	In progress	X	X			X	X
E	Public awareness and dissemination of results								
1	Media work	X	In progress	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Articles in newspapers	20	27	2	4	4	4	4	2
	Annual public meetings of stakeholders	20	8	4	4	4	4	4	X
	Indoor portable information boards	6	2 sets x 6 boards		6	1		1	
	Interactive study tool	2	In progress		2			1	
2	Training for farmers	6	4	0	3	3			
3	Establishment of notice boards	59	In progress	0	20	39			
4	Preparation of printed materials (booklets)	10 000	14 000	0	0	X	X	X	X
5	Update of management guidelines	1						1	
6	Work with landowners	X	In progress	X	X	X	X	X	X
7	Web page	X	In progress	X	X	X	X	X	X
8	Working group for promotion of added-value products from alvar grasslands	5	1	0	2	2	1		
9	Layman's report	1						X	X
F	Overall project operation and monitoring of the project progress								
1	Project management	X	In progress	X	X	X	X	X	X
2	Networking with other projects	2	In Progress			1	1		1
3	After-Life conservation plan	1							1

2.2. Assessment as to whether the project objectives and work plan are still viable.

The project has advanced positively during the reporting period and generally follows the project proposal. In terms of concrete conservation actions the project has developed faster than expected. As the Action C.1. Restoration of the habitat started in 2014 instead of 2015 we have managed to restore 549 hectares of alvar grasslands on both private and state owned land since the project start (380 during the reporting period). The area restored during previous reporting period and the majority of that restored since May 2015 is already grazed also (Action C.2.). We have started with Action C.4. (seed sowing) and proceeded with all the actions that were initiated during the last reporting period. Due to great interest towards the restoration we had to organise additional farmers training events (Act. E.2.). As the concrete conservation actions started earlier than initially proposed we had to finish the booklets (Act. E.4.) also earlier not to miss the opportunity to educate the public and disseminate the results simultaneously with the restoration actions in the landscape. The advancement of the project has created quite large media interest so we have published substantially more articles in the newspapers (Act. E.1.) than initially foreseen. There were 15 newspaper or magazine articles published during this reporting period. Generally all actions planned to start in the end of 2015 and in the beginning of 2016 have been initiated. However, there have been some drawbacks and problems with the technical implementation of few actions (see chapter 2.3). As those problems have only slightly delayed the implementation of some actions, we have all reasons to believe that achieving the objectives of the project in the manner and on the conditions declared in the proposal is realistic and feasible.

2.3 Problems encountered.

During the reporting period we faced two drawbacks in the implementation of the projects that could be characterised as technical difficulties possible to correct. The first one concerned the Action C.3. Re-construction of access roads. Initially it was planned to re-construct ca 10 km of access roads of the project areas in 2015. The method of reconstruction is planned to be paving of the excising road with lime-stone gravel. It is obligatory to carry out the public procurement to find external assistance to carry out this work. We started with this action in summer 2015 by selecting two roads (ca 2 km in total length) in the Vanamõisa-Suure-Rootsi project area (area no 13 according to the Annex 1 of the Inception Report) and preparing the public procurement documentation. By the deadline of the procurement in September we received only three biddings and all were from the companies located in the mainland. No local companies with lower transportation costs and access to the local gravel pits took part of the procurement for some reason. Therefore the price of the reconstruction would have been unreasonably high, restoration of 2 km (out of 45 km foreseen) gravel road would have exploited 25% of the total budget of the actions. However, the initial price estimations of the local companies were much cheaper indicating that the budget of that action is generally not underestimated. Due to that we decided to reject all the biddings and postpone the action until the year 2016. It is possible that the length of roads to be restored was too small this time or the description of the work too general. In 2016 we plan to restore more roads and compose more detailed technical description of the road restoration with the volumes of the materials and restoration methods specified. Despite of this drawback the project area no 13 is still accessible for the habitat restoration machinery and the cattle. Postponing the re-construction of those roads does not prevent the habitat restoration nor the reintroduction of grazing in these areas. The access is just not comfortable for visitors and sometimes impenetrable for regular cars.

The second drawback concerned the Action E.3. Establishment of notice boards. The establishment of information boards is planned to be carried out periodically depending on the advancement of habitat restoration. If there are no applications or at least interest from the farmers' side for the restoration of a particular project area in the given year, we will not start with information boards establishment. In 2015 we decided to order 18 information boards for different project areas (see annex 6 of the IR) where the habitat restoration was initiated. The contract for the information boards design, printing and establishing together with manufacturing the wooden stands for the boards was signed through the public procurement in October 2015. The first alarming sign was very slow work progress of the contractor, the company was unable to deal with several tasks at the same time. They started with designing the information boards without initiating the manufacturing of wooden stands. The result was a delay of approximately 2.5 months (until Feb 2016) in fulfilling the contract. As the quality of wooden stands did not meet the technical requirements of the public procurement we had to terminate the contract without accepting any part of it (printed information boards or wooden stands). The quality of the information boards was acceptable but as those constituted in the same entirety of the public procurement with the wooden stands we could not accept the information boards either. The contractor refused to collect and utilise the wooden stands and information boards so EB had to organise the collection, transport and storage of this property as legally EB is not the owner of those materials but responsible for the preservation until the contractor claims those back. As we terminated the contract no financial loss was incurred to the project. The solution is that we allocate the design and printing of the information boards separately from the manufacturing of wooden stands in the next public procurement. So if one contractor fails we can at least accept another part of the contract in the future. Those 18 information boards together with wooden stands will be procured once again with additional ones foreseen for this year. The respective public procurement will be prepared in June-July 2016 and the information boards established in September-October. Regardless of the above-mentioned difficulties we can assure that the overall goals, general work plan, the budget and the implementation of other actions of the project are not at risk.

3. Administrative part

3.1. Description of project management.

The roles of the project team members have not changed since the Inception Report (May 2015). In EB the roles of full time (PM I) and part time project manager (PM II) are defined in their personal job descriptions. The list of the responsibilities of PM I is broader than in case of PM II. It includes the daily communication with landowners and farmers restoring the project areas, preparation of the materials of respective contracts, fieldwork, verification of the restoration quality, accepting the financial documentation, communication with book-keeping office and media communication. The job of the PM II is more technical involving double checking of the project documentation, preparation and verification of different documentation (reporting guidelines, public procurement documents, contracts with farmers etc.), preparing the reports to financiers, fieldwork, verification of cost documents, budget control etc. In addition to two project managers different specialists of EB are involved in the project activities on demand. They give their input to the project in the frames of their everyday work.

At each associated beneficiary the coordinator is responsible for the direct implementation of the project activities and for the project management also (reporting, following the budget etc.). Bookkeeping has been provided by the bookkeeper office of each organisation.

At associated beneficiary UT Mrs Aveliina Helm (part-time employment) is responsible for the implementation of their project tasks. The representative of ESCCA in the project is Mr Jaak-Albert Metsoja who is responsible for the project management and the implementation of the actions by this associated beneficiary (part time job for the project). At associated beneficiary EULS Ms Kadri Tali is responsible for the implementation of project tasks (also part time job). For project reporting at associated beneficiaries, the project coordinators mentioned above are responsible.

The project team functions efficiently. Each partner implements its activities according to the description of the project. The co-operation between project partners is also fruitful. The main method to update the state and the developments of the project and to concretize the plans and personal roles is to organise a special kickoff meeting held at the beginning of each year to revise the progress and to clear all the goals by project partners that have to be achieved during that year together with giving an overview to the rest of the team on the most recent project activities of each partner. Another method to ensure the fluent development of the project is to contact the representatives of associated beneficiaries by e-mail or phone regularly.

Principle stages in project management

Lot of effort was invested by EB into coordinating the concrete conservation actions during current reporting period. It embraces daily communication with farmers and preparing the restoration contracts which is followed by the quality control when the restoration starts and measuring the restored area when the work is finished. Preparing different information materials and the respective procurement documentation has also been a time consuming task. In May and June 2015 PM I and PM II prepared the public procurement documentation for the re-construction of roads (Act. C.3.) at the project area no 13.

In July-September 2015 PM I and PM II prepared the public procurement documentation for establishment of notice boards (Act. E.3.) and printing project booklets (Act. E.4.).

On 25th to 26th of September 2015 the second farmers training was carried out, PM I and PM II of EB helped to organise the event in Muhu Island.

On 22nd and 23rd and 25th of September the representative of External Monitoring Team Luule Sinnisov visited the project. During the first day PM I and II introduced the project areas and the activities carried out at Hiiumaa Island. The second day was spent in the office to verify the documentation and general progress of the project with PM I of EB. During the third day the representative of External Monitoring Team visited the training for farmers in Muhu Island and met with the representatives of the associated beneficiaries.

On 20th October 2015 PM I and PM II of EB participated at the meeting with the respective of the State Forest Management Centre (SFMC) responsible for the restoration activities in state owned land. The protocol for the establishment of different physical objects (information boards, cattle grids, re-construction of roads etc.) of the project at the state owned land was agreed.

On 4th of January 2016 PM I and PM II of EB organised the meeting with the procurement department specialists of EB to discuss the advancement possibilities of the further public procurements of the project.

On 6th of January 2016 PM I and PM II of EB participated at the meeting with the respective officials of the Ministry of Environment to discuss the role and financing possibilities of SFMC in the frames of project activities.

On 2nd of February 2016 the kick-off meeting of the project activities for the year 2016 was organised for the project beneficiaries to revise the progress and to clear all the goals that

have to be achieved during forthcoming year. The representatives of all the project beneficiaries took part at that meeting.

On 9th of February 2016 the third farmers training (Act. E.2.) was carried out by PM I and PM II of EB. This was specifically targeted to the contractors of SFMC restoring the project areas at state owned land.

In January-March 2016 PM I and PM II prepared the public procurement documentation for the cattle fence materials (Act. C.2.) needed for the year 2016.

In February-April 2016 several habitat restoration contracts were prepared for signing by the PM I of the EB.

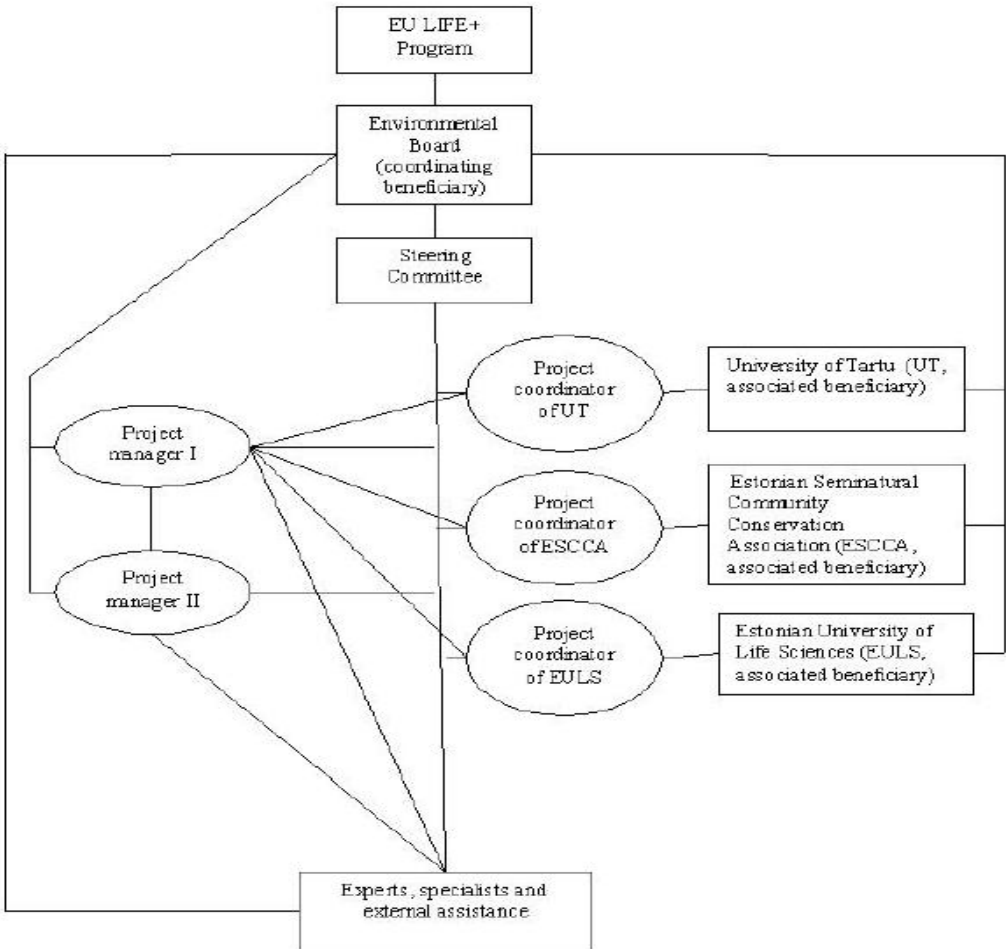
On 12th of April the 4th farmers training (Act. E.2.) was carried out by PM I and PM II of EB. This was also specifically targeted to the contractors of SFMC restoring the project areas at state owned land.

In April 2016 PM II prepared the Progress Report I of the project.

In addition to the meetings mentioned above, numerous working meetings were held and fieldwork days carried out until the reporting date on different subjects in several project areas concerned with the implementation of the project. The meetings were attended by different stakeholders and experts depending on the subject of the specific meetings. Many questions were also discussed and problems solved via e-mail and phone communication with different stakeholders, officials and project team.

3.2. Organigramme of the project team and the project management structure.

Project management structure and the team is illustrated below. It has not changed since the Inception Report (May 2015).



4. Technical part

This project aims to restore 2500 hectares of alvar grasslands in Estonia, designated to the European Union's Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) code 6280* (Nordic alvar and precambrian calcareous flatrocks). Unmanaged sites have been heavily overgrown with shrubs (mostly juniper *Juniperus communis*) and trees (mostly Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris*).

The general objective of this project is to restore the most valuable, but currently overgrown alvar areas on 2500 hectares and to create a possibility for local farmers to manage these areas after the initial restoration.

4.1. Actions.

4.1.1. Action A.1. Preparation of agreements with farmers.

Milestone	Deadline in Proposal	Status 30/04/2015
All restoration contracts signed	01/12/2016	40 signed

Preparation of agreements with farmers started right after the first training for farmers was organised by ESCCA in November 2014. As the interest towards starting with the restoration activities as soon as possible was great from the side of farmers we started with restoration contracts sooner than initially proposed. Therefore since the last report we have signed 23 contracts. The total number of 40 contracts signed covers the area of ca 842 hectares of alvar grasslands to be restored. Initially we planned to sign the first 25 contracts during the year 2015. 14 more contracts are in the technical preparation phase for signing covering the area of 415 hectares. Those will be agreed during the second half of this year the latest. Therefore we can conclude that the progress of that action in private owned land has been over expectations and we assume to finalise this action by the end of 2016. In state owned land the respective contracts are prepared by the SFMC who is responsible for alvar grassland restoration in this land. The SFMC signs the land lease contract with livestock keeper to ensure the management of the area and after that usually organises the public procurement to find the subcontractor to carry out the habitat restoration. The goal for SFMC to cover with restoration contracts is ca 1250 hectares of which ca 500 hectares have the restoration contract by now. Some areas are restored by the staff of the SFMC where they do not sign the restoration contract. Therefore the area under restoration at SFMC is actually even larger.

4.1.2. Action C.1. Restoration of the habitat.

Milestone	Deadline in Proposal	Status 30/04/2016
Restoration work finished	31/12/2018	549 ha restored
Deliverable	Deadline in Proposal	Status 30/04/2016
Report: Assessment of project development by external experts I	01/09/2016	In progress
Report: Assessment of project development by external experts II	03/09/2018	Not relevant yet
Report: Description of restoration works carried out on project areas	31/12/2018	Not relevant yet

The restoration is carried out in two phases: the first phase involves cutting down and removing the woody biomass from the areas. We have managed to carry out this phase on 440 hectares. The second phase will usually be carried out after one year has passed since the end of the first phase when the stumps height of bushes and trees is corrected after the first grazing season. This has been carried out on 109 hectares which means the area where the restoration has already finished. In addition there is ca 365 hectares on private land and ca 500 hectares on state owned land where the restoration has started but neither restoration phases have been completed yet. By the reporting date restoration work was initiated at 24 different project areas out of 25.

The third active period of alvar grasslands restoration will start in the autumn 2016. During summer the work is stopped as it is the mating season of alvar grasslands wildlife and also the period of all the rest of seasonal agricultural activities for the farmers.

At the end of March 2015 Mr Ejvind Rosen and Mr Sven Pettersson from Sweden visited 11 project areas where the restoration was initiated by that time. The experts collected the necessary information for the 1st report on the assessment of project development by external experts which will be ready on time. Another expert from Sweden, Sven-Olov Borgegard visited the project areas and the facilities of livestock keepers grazing the project areas from 18th to 22nd of May 2015. The expertise of Mr Borgegard manure handling and the welfare of the livestock. His feedback will be included in the 1st report on the assessment of project development by external experts.

4.1.3. Action C.2. Re-introduction of grazing.

Milestone	Deadline in Proposal	Status 30/04/2016
Contracts signed with farmers to carry out grazing in restored sites	01/12/2016	In progress

If the grazing is not initiated right after the removal of evergreen bushes and trees during the habitat restoration the deciduous bushes start to proliferate. Therefore the grazed area has to expand generally following the progress of habitat restoration. By the reporting date the alvar grassland area where the grazing was reintroduced was approximately 500 hectares. As grazing contracts are signed usually in May this area will expand substantially for those alvars restored from autumn 2015 to spring 2016 for the year 2016.

This year EB needs to carry out additional international public procurement to purchase the fence materials and other grazing related appliances. In January-March 2016 PM I and PM II prepared the public procurement documentation for the cattle fence materials (ca 80 km), cattle shelters (6), portable watering facilities (7) etc. (see the photos of those in Annex 1) needed for the year 2016. The deadline of bidding is the beginning of May as the procurement is international due to the budget which means longer opening period for the procurement. The shipping of the fence materials will probably take place during May.

In addition to facilitating the re-introduction of grazing EB modified the technical documentation worked out during the last reporting period. In order to enhance the quality of the public procurement of grazing materials we modified the technical documentation of portable livestock shelters and cattle grids. There were some minor technical shortcomings that needed correction to improve the functionality of those appliances.

4.1.4. Action C.3. Re-construction of access roads.

Deliverable	Deadline in Proposal	Status 30/04/2016
Report: Map and description of work of re-constructed access roads	01/12/2018	In progress

The fieldwork to specify the need for roads re-construction for the year 2015 were carried out already in April 2015. During the fieldwork the input information for the respective deliverable (report) was also collected. For the year 2015 two access roads of the Vanamõisa-Suure-Rootsi project area (area no 13) were selected, the respective general work description compiled and the public procurement organised. By the deadline of the procurement in September 2015 we received only three biddings but all were from the companies located in the mainland. No local companies from the island Saaremaa with lower transportation costs and access to the local gravel pits took part of the procurement. Therefore the price of the reconstruction would have been unreasonably high, restoration of 2 km gravel road would have exploited ca 25% of the total budget of that actions. Due to that we decided to reject all the biddings and postpone the action until the year 2016. In 2016 we plan to compose more detailed technical description of the road restoration with the volumes of the materials and restoration methods specified. Despite of this drawback the project area no 13 is still accessible for the habitat restoration machinery and the cattle. Postponing the re-construction of those roads does not prevent the habitat restoration nor the reintroduction of grazing in these areas. The access is just not comfortable for visitors and sometimes (late autumn and early spring) impenetrable for regular cars.

4.1.5. Action C.4. Restoration of habitat through seed sowing.

Milestone	Deadline in Proposal	Status 30/04/2016
Seed sowing carried out	01/12/2018	In progress

During the summer of 2015, the survey of seed donor sites was carried out on alvar grassland habitats in the vicinity of project sites Kurese (project area no 3) and Neeme (area no 23). We identified suitable sites on 3 hectares which will be further surveyed for suitability during the summer of 2016 and where seed collection and hay collection will be carried out. For Kurese, where restoration is already ongoing, seed and hay will be collected in July and August 2016. Collected hay will be transferred immediately to restoration site, seeds will be sown in autumn (September-October) after their germination capacity is evaluated. In Neeme, the seed-sowing works will start when the restoration activities have started. The work will altogether last until summer 2018 followed by drawing the conclusions and analysing the effectiveness of the action.

4.1.6. Action D.1. Biodiversity monitoring.

Deliverable	Deadline in Proposal	Status 30/04/2016
Report: Results of monitoring of biodiversity on restored sites	01/03/2019	In progress

The data collection for the respective report was replicated in the unrestored areas in summer 2015. Biodiversity survey were carried out on all project areas, altogether on 25 sites. On each site, permanent plots were established, where vascular plant diversity, butterfly diversity, management, disturbance regime and environmental indicators were quantified and soil samples for soil chemistry analysis were collected. Fieldworks were mostly carried out during May and June 2015, but as the maintenance of permanent plots during the restoration activities needed an unexpected effort, we visited each site also after the monitoring for checking and re-establishing the plot markings. During 2016, all sites will be again visited to check the markings of the permanent plots and estimate the visual changes in the management and disturbance indicators following last restoration activities. On seed sowing sites (Kurese, Neeme), permanent observation plots (additional to those already present) will be established in summer 2016 to monitor the changes after the seed sowing. During the initial survey in 2015 and during the visits in 2016, the specific work-sheet is filled.

The report of the monitoring results is written by the UT after the monitoring is finished in all the project areas.

4.1.7. Action D.2. Restoration success monitoring.

Deliverable	Deadline in Proposal	Status 30/04/2016
Report: Results of the monitoring of restoration success	01/03/2019	In progress

The restoration success is monitored constantly by the PM I and PM II of the coordinating beneficiary. There have been continuous fieldwork to assess the restoration quality in each month. The terms of the habitat restoration contracts demand that the contractor shall inform EB when the first hectare of the alvar grassland is restored. Then PM I or PM II visits the area and check the quality (stump height, coverage of bushes and trees etc.). Based on this fieldwork inspection protocol is compiled and the direct feedback to the contractor given at the site. Only after that the contractor is allowed to proceed with the restoration. The importance of such procedure is that if the contractor misunderstands the terms of the contract or does not apply the proper restoration operations the quality can be improved in the very beginning of the restoration work. So far this constant verification has assured high quality of the habitat restoration.

After the restoration work is completed the quality is checked also by the scientist of the EULS. Scientist will evaluate the restoration success of the area by checking different aspects of the restoration work. This phase involving the staff of EULS starts in May 2016 in the project area no 2 and 21. Report of the results is written by the EULS after the restoration work is finished on all the project areas.

4.1.8 Action D.3. Socio-economic monitoring.

Deliverable	Deadline in Proposal	Status 30/04/2016
Report: Results of the socio-economic impact monitoring	01/03/2019	In progress

The questionnaire targeted to local entrepreneurs, project contractors, tourists and landowners is filled on-line and the results summarised in automatically generated table. So the approach to the interviewee is rather personal, at first he or she is contacted directly and after getting

the agreement to participate the link to the questionnaire provided. The respective questionnaire is available at <http://goo.gl/forms/C7d0GR5pHo>. The survey of project contractors is also conducted online (<http://goo.gl/forms/vQPv9Smrxb>) and will be carried out when the restoration activities are finished. The socio-economic monitoring of the local entrepreneurs and project contractors started in 2015 prior to restoration activities and will continue in 2016. In case of tourist survey we will use a tear off page of the project brochure that they can fill and return by prepaid postal service. This part of the monitoring started in November 2015. Until now we have some tear off pages returned but the preliminary conclusions are yet to be made after the end of the tourism's season 2016. The questionnaire of landowners is also in paper format and questioning this group will be carried out in parallel to the fieldwork of monitoring of restoration success or during local dissemination events. The summarising results of the whole study will be included in the Final Report.

4.1.9. Action E.1. Media work.

Milestone	Deadline in Proposal	Status 30/04/2016
Public meeting I organised	31/12/2014	Completed in 12/12/2014
Visual materials for the exhibition/learning centre designed	02/02/2015	Completed in January 2016
Visual materials for training are printed and exhibition/learning centre established on reference areas	01/05/2015	Indoor portable information boards established in January 2016 Interactive study tool in progress
Public meeting II organised	31/12/2015	Completed in 11/04/2016
Public meeting III organised	31/12/2016	Not relevant yet
Public meeting IV organised	31/12/2017	Not relevant yet
Public meeting V organised	31/12/2018	Not relevant yet
Deliverable	Deadline in Proposal	Status 30/04/2016
2 articles published in local newspapers	31/12/2014	Completed in 21/11/2014
4 articles published in local newspapers	31/12/2015	Achieved much earlier
4 articles published in local newspapers	31/12/2016	Not relevant yet
4 articles published in local newspapers	31/12/2017	Not relevant yet
4 articles published in local newspapers	31/12/2018	Not relevant yet
Report: Summary of dissemination work carried out during the project	01/03/2019	Not relevant yet
2 articles published in local newspapers	30/06/2019	Not relevant yet

Visual materials for the exhibition/learning centre were finally designed in October-November 2015. Indoor portable information boards were ready in January 2016. There was a slight delay as we had to carry out the public procurement to design and print the indoor portable information boards and the contractor did not follow the time schedule of the contract. Those materials were delivered to the learning centres in the reference areas in Saaremaa and Hiiumaa Island in January 2016. As the tourism season usually ends in the beginning of September the delay in delivery of indoor portable information boards did not reduce substantially the potential number of people that would have seen those during non-tourism season. As the booklets of the project were ready earlier we could start exposing the indoor portable information boards together with distributing the booklets in the learning centres. The interactive study tool is still under construction. The technical design to allow to use it in computers, smartphones etc. was more complicated than initially predicted. The tool will be ready in May 2016 and usable in learning centres in summer 2016.

Four public meetings were held in Saaremaa, Hiiumaa, Muhu and Läänemaa regions to introduce the project development and the opportunities to take part of the project to the local community, landowners, restoration workers and farmers since the last report. Public meeting in Saaremaa took place on 31st of October 2015. In Hiiumaa the public meeting was organised on 7th of November 2015. The public meeting in Muhu took place on November 21st and in mainland on April 11th 2016. During meetings the project team and the scientists introduced in details the project advancement, preliminary results, restoration plans and the importance of the project activities to the local people. During the first three meetings short fieldtrip to the nearby project area was organized for the participants.

With this report we provide you 2 newspaper articles from 2014, 4 from 2015 and 1 from 2016 (Annex 2) following Annex 1 of the Grant Agreement. The media coverage of the project activities has been more fruitful than initially predicted. Between two reports we have been able to publish 9 articles in local newspapers, 5 articles in national newspapers or magazines and one in international media. In addition there have been several blog posts concerning the project from the SFMC. We had also one broadcast in the national TV in October 2015. The media reflections of the project are listed at <http://www.keskkonnaamet.ee/elualvaritel/elu-alvaritele/meist-meedias/>. Therefore we see no obstacles in meeting the respective goals of media publications. To avoid nature harming printouts of electronic newspaper articles we propose to reallocate the respective Deliverables concerning writing articles to the local newspapers to the Milestones with the same amount and deadlines as initially foreseen.

4.1.10. Action E.2. Training for farmers.

Milestone	Deadline in Proposal	Status 30/04/2016
All participant trained to carry out the restoration works	31/08/2016	In progress

ESCCA organised the second training for farmers on 25th to 26th of September 2015. PM I and PM II of EB helped to organise the event in Muhu Island. The practical demonstration of the restoration machinery was followed by the indoor theoretical lectures explaining the restoration methods and the general importance and values of the alvar grasslands. The number of participants was 50.

On 9th of February 2016 the third farmers training was carried out in Muhu Island. This was specifically targeted to the contractors of SFMC restoring the project areas at state owned land. The number of participants was 22.

The fourth farmers training was organised on 12th of April 2016 in Muhu Island. This time the number of participants was 20. After each training the respective certificate has been issued to each of the participant. During last three trainings the Koguva-Igaküla project area (area no 7) was visited for the practical demonstration.

By now we have trained more than 150 farmers, landowners and entrepreneurs (we expected to train only 50 people initially). This is due to substantially greater interest towards the project than initially predicted. As we changed the reference areas we managed to save the budget and were able to train substantially more participants with the same amount of funds. Therefore we have been within the planned budget carrying out this action with much larger impact than initially planned.

4.1.11. Action E.3. Establishment of notice boards.

Milestone	Deadline in Proposal	Status 30/04/2016
Information boards are placed on each project area	31/12/2016	In progress

The establishment of information boards will be carried out periodically depending on the advancement of habitat restoration. If there is no applications or at least interest from the farmers side for the restoration of particular project area in the given year we will not start with information boards establishment.

In 2015 we decided to order 18 information boards for different project where the habitat restoration was initiated. For that the public procurement was carried out to find the contractor. As the quality of wooden stands for the information boards did not meet the technical requirements of the public procurement we had to terminate the contract without accepting any part of it (see the chapter 2.3 for details). As we terminated the contract no financial loss was incurred to the project. Those 18 information boards together with wooden stands will be procured once again with 21 additional ones foreseen for this year.

In addition we ordered smaller information boards (see the photo in Annex 1) for the purpose of practical management of grazing in the restored areas which inform the visitors how to behave in the vicinity of livestock and electric fences. All the livestock shelters and portable watering facilities were also marked with the notice boards or stickers bearing the NATURA 2000 and LIFE logos (see the photo in Annex 1). This marking will also continue this year.

4.1.12. Action E.4. Preparation of printed materials.

Milestone	Deadline in Proposal	Status 30/04/2016
The booklets are printed and delivered to the local businesses	01/12/2016	Booklets ready in Nov. 2015 Delivering in progress
Deliverable	Deadline in Proposal	Status 30/04/2016
Booklets are written and designed	01/06/2016	Completed in Oct. 2015

The booklets of the project (Annex 3) were printed much earlier and delivered to EB in November 2015. This was needed due to the great public interest towards the project. Instead of 10 000 booklets we ordered 14 000 as the price turned out to be lower than initially predicted. We printed three different booklets one for each island (Saaremaa, Hiiumaa and Muhu) involved in the project as those island and the respective alvars are slightly different.

Those are mainly meant for the clients of local entrepreneurs visiting the project areas of these particular islands. Fourth booklet describes the project and characterises the alvars of Estonia summarising the essence of all the island-specific booklets. The last one is mainly addressed to the stakeholders and tourist from the mainland or abroad who would probably visit the alvars of different islands and the information given is not that area specific. Therefore this booklet was also translated into English, Russian and Finnish (4000 copies in total). The booklets will be uploaded to the project web page during summer 2016. Delivering booklets to the local businesses also started in November 2015 and it will continue more actively in early summer 2016 as this is the beginning of the tourism season. Therefore we can predict that booklets will be delivered to local businesses sooner than the respective deadline in project proposal.

4.1.13. Action E.5. Update of management guidelines.

Deliverable	Deadline in Proposal	Status 30/04/2016
Best practice guidelines are updated	31/12/2018	Not relevant yet

The information for compiling the best practice guidelines is gathered constantly during the project.

4.1.14. Action E.6. Work with landowners.

Milestone	Deadline in Proposal	Status 30/04/2016
Educational trip for land-owners	31/08/2016	In progress

There have been few personal meetings and e-mail communications with foreign landowners on demand since the first report to introduce the project activities and plans and to get the landowner to communicate with the farmer interested in the restoration and re-introduction of grazing. In September 2016 first letters and photos about the restoration work carried out will be sent out to the foreign landowners participating in the project.

The first educational trip for land-owners was organised on 23rd of May 2015 in Muhu Island (Koguva-Igaküla, Nõmmküla-Üügu and Lõetsa project areas, no 7, 9 and 10, respectively) and second one on 18th of June 2015 in Hiiumaa Island (Käina lahe-Kassari project area, no 18) (see Annex 1 for photos). The main target group for these study trips was local landowners. During those trips the restored areas of the project were visited and the idea and methods of the project introduced. In Muhu there were 45 participants and in Hiiumaa 13 participants. The stakeholders were invited to participate using personal contacts established during the project and the social media announcement (FB site of the project). Those project areas were selected as the habitat restoration was carried out there in quite impressive scale already with good results to demonstrate the project success. Those areas were also easy to access for the stakeholders interested. As the initial target was to take 80 people to the study trips all together we see no obstacles in meeting this target as we plan to proceed with these trips also in 2016. As the cost of the transportation is lower due to the change of the reference areas, we can take more landowners to the study trips than planned initially.

By now we have gathered all the necessary clearances from the landowners in order to include at least 1000 hectares of private land in the project. Much of the work was done by the PM I of EB. However, since the beginning of the project the livestock owners interested in

restoration and re-introduction of grazing in some particular areas also took the initiative in getting the landowners' clearances and gained several by themselves.

4.1.15. Action E.7. Web page.

Deliverable	Deadline in Proposal	Status 30/04/2016
Project home page published	01/06/2016	In progress

The Estonian version of the project home page is operational since the end of September 2014 and the English version of it is available since March 2015. Approximately 3200 people have visited the web page since the last report. The address of it is <http://www.keskkonnaamet.ee/elualvaritel/>. An Interactive Map is available on the web page at <http://www.keskkonnaamet.ee/elualvaritel/elu-alvaritel-kaart/>. The photos and the restoration activities descriptions can be followed there for the project areas. Both the web page and the interactive map are updated periodically. The Facebook page of the project (<https://www.facebook.com/lifetoalvars>) is modified and renewed continuously by adding relevant information, announcements of the project events and photos of the conservation activities. By now we have gained 195 “likes” which is the number of direct followers reaching each inscription as soon as they log in their FB account. However, the number of people reached by a single inscription could be up to several hundred depending on the amount of people sharing the news in this social media network.

4.1.16. Action E.8. Working group for promotion of added-value products from alvar grasslands.

Deliverable	Deadline in Proposal	Status 30/04/2016
Report: added-value products working group work results	01/06/2017	In progress

The action was started in 2015 with gathering the information on the interest groups possible involved in any kind of products originating from alvar grasslands. At first the wood based producers were focussed. Soon it became clear that the alvar related handicraft products are well established, the respective market functions well and there is no urgent need to promote this sector. However, the usage of the wood material in fence building of the same areas where it was gathered during the restoration has been promoted among the farmers since the end of the project by EB. Also the usage of wooden biomass collected during the restoration for the heat and electricity production rather than on site burning has been promoted during the project among the contractors in the frames of that action. For example, from the Koguva-Igaküla project area more than 6500 m³ of biomass has been used as the raw material for heat and electricity production. Later the meat related producers among the farmers of the project areas were focussed. The first official assembly of the working group for promotion of added-value products from alvar grasslands was organised in Kuressaare town on 5th of January 2016. This event was mainly attended by the livestock keepers grazing the project areas of Saaremaa and Muhu islands. The idea was to synchronize the level of knowledge among more and less experienced meat producers on valorising the meat products of the livestock used for the seminatural communities management. The possible solutions for processing and marketing the meat products as “meadow meat” close to the initial production areas were

discussed. The lecture was given by the sheep farmer experienced in short chain marketing of his own farm products. The number of participants was 13. The next meeting focussing on other possible added-value product also will be organised in autumn 2016.

4.1.17. Action E.9. Layman's report.

Deliverable	Deadline in Proposal	Status 30/04/2016
Layman's report completed	03/06/2019	Not relevant yet

4.1.18. Action F.1. Project management.

Milestone	Deadline in Proposal	Status 30/04/2016
Project coordinators are hired	01/09/2014	Completed in time
Participation on kick-off meeting	01/12/2014	Completed in time
Participating in end of the project meeting	30/09/2019	Not relevant yet
Deliverable	Deadline in Proposal	Status 30/04/2016
Report: Financial audit	01/08/2019	Not relevant yet

PM I (full time) and PM II (part time) of EB work on daily bases in implementing the project activities making sure the actions of EB and the associated beneficiaries are carried out according to the Grant Agreement and the reports delivered to the Commission on time. For the detailed description of the project management see the chapter 3.1. The co-operation between project partners is efficient. The main method to update the state of the project and to concretize the plans and personal roles is to organise the team meetings regularly.

The first report of the project was delivered to the Commission in May 2015. The reaction to the feedback received after that is given in Annex 4. Preparations for the current report started in the beginning of April 2016.

During the last reporting period we had 3-days long monitoring visit (in September 2015). The response to the letter received after that monitoring visit is given in Annex 5.

The second Steering Group meeting will be organised in May-June 2016 in Hiiumaa. The agenda is currently prepared by the PM I of EB for the next meeting. Steering Group consists of the representatives of the CB, project partners (UT, EULS, ESCCA), SFMC, Estonian Fund for Nature, Estonian Ornithological Society, local authorities, local action groups, landowners, farmers and restoration workers. An overview of the project advancement will be presented to the participants, some restoration area will be visited etc.

4.1.19. Action F.2. Networking with other projects.

Milestone	Deadline in Proposal	Status 30/04/2016
Networking with other projects visit I completed	31/07/2016	Accomplished in April 2016
Networking with other projects visit II completed	31/07/2017	Not relevant yet
Deliverable	Deadline in Proposal	Status 30/04/2016
Report: Results of	04/09/2017	Not relevant yet

networking with other projects		
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We have established contacts with Italian project LIFE12 NAT/IT/000818 XERO-GRAZING. The main interest for EB in case of XERO-GRAZING project is the similarity of the habitats and the restoration methods used in that project. The first networking visit to Italy was agreed to take place from 26th to 29th of April 2016. The representatives of each beneficiary of our project took part in it. We have also agreed the host the networking visit from the project called LIFE Aran (LIFE12 NAT/IE/000995) from Ireland in Muhu Island at the end of May this year.

In the beginning of June 2015 PM I visited the seminar organised by the LIFE Viva Grass (LIFE13 ENV/LT/000189) to introduce our project. In the middle of June 2015 PM I and PM II of EB hosted the visit of the coordinator Niclas Bergius from LIFE+ projects MIA (ended by now) and LIFE Taiga (LIFE13 NAT/SE/000065). The project areas in Muhu and Saaremaa Islands were visited and the project aims introduced. The co-operation with LIFE URBANCOWS is also continued.

4.1.20. Action F.3. After-Life conservation plan.

Deliverable	Deadline in Proposal	Status 30/04/2016
After-Life conservation plan	01/12/2019	Not relevant yet

Action		2014		2015				2016				2017	Envisaged progress until the next report
E.8. Working group for promotion of added-value products from alvar grasslands	Proposed			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	The second assembly of the working group organised.
	Actual												
E.9. Layman's report	Proposed												The action is scheduled to 2018-2019.
	Actual												
F.1. Project management	Proposed	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Carried out according to the proposal, MTR prepared and submitted.
	Actual												
F.2. Networking with other projects	Proposed								X	X			2 nd study trip to network with other projects agreed.
	Actual												
F.3. After-Life conservation plan	Proposed												The action is scheduled to 2019.
	Actual												

4.3. Impact

Nature & Biodiversity:

The main environmental issue tackled in the frames of this project is the habitat degradation caused by the cease of traditional management practice (grazing) and afforestation of alvar grassland areas. We have managed to carry out the phase of reducing the canopy coverage on 440 hectares of alvar grasslands. The second phase will usually be carried out after one year has passed since the end of the first phase when the stumps height of bushes and trees is corrected after the first grazing season. This has been carried out on 109 hectares which means the area where the restoration has already finished. In addition there is ca 365 hectares on private land and ca 500 hectares on state owned land where the restoration has started but neither restoration phases have been completed yet. By the reporting date restoration work was initiated at 24 different project areas out of 25. By now we have managed to re-introduce grazing on ca 550 hectares of restored alvar grasslands overgrown with trees and bushes before the project started. This is the first time in Estonia when the alvar grasslands are restored using heavy machinery at large scale. So far the restoration of this habitat has been implemented mainly manually. As our results are encouraging and the quality of the habitat restoration high this approach and machinery could be used in alvar grassland restoration also outside the project in the future.

Indirect impacts:

The main indirect impact that could be mentioned is that several livestock keepers and landowners outside the project areas or even outside the NATURA 2000 sites have been interested in the project after we initiated the restoration activities. The direct change of the landscape appearance (open area instead of bushland) and media coverage of the restoration activities has probably been the main motivator.

4.4 Outside LIFE

During the reporting period PMI and PMII of EB took part in consulting of another LIFE+ project proposal concerning the restoration of Fennoscandian wooded meadows (habitat type 6530* in the Directive 92/43/EEC) called WOODMEADOWLIFE. Unfortunately the proposal did not receive the obligatory approval from the Ministry of Environment which is a prerequisite for applying for the own financing from the Environmental Investments Centre. Therefore the project proposal was not submitted to EC in 2015 and the degradation of that habitat type proceeds.

5. Financial part

5.1. Costs incurred.

Budget breakdown categories	Total costs (€)	Costs incurred 01.09.14-30.04.16 (€)	% of total costs
1. Personnel	213022,00	66617,43	31,27
2. Travel and subsistence	39900,00	15952,22	39,98
3. External assistance	2354900,00	791248,83	33,60
4. Durable goods			
Infrastructure	341000,00	67320,00	19,74
Equipment	0,00	0,00	0,00
Prototype	0,00	0,00	0,00
5. Land purchase / long-term lease	0,00	0,00	0,00
6. Consumables	704575,00	176828,38	25,10
7. Other Costs	12100,00	0,00	0,00
8. Overheads	60368,00	23641,59	39,16
TOTAL	3725865,00	1141608,45	30,64

As approximately 1/3 of the project lifetime is over it is expected that ca 30% of each budget category has been spent to follow the project proposal and the schedule. The higher proportion of travel costs spent is due to the allocation of Farmers' training (Action E.2.) and external experts' visiting (Action C.1.) cost to that category. Both of those activities were initiated earlier than initially proposed in the proposal due to the large interest of stakeholders to restore the habitats. The restoration of targeted habitat started also earlier than initially predicted. Therefore we have spent approximately 34% of that budget category already. Other costs category is underused as we have not had to pay author fees yet. Lots of illustrative materials have originated from the project staff with no author fees paid. The higher proportion of overheads spent is due to active coordination of the habitat restoration. The local travel costs of fieldwork and communication costs of PMI and PMII of EB are allocated under that category.

Action no	Action name	Foreseen costs	Spent so far	Remaining	Project final cost
A.1.	Preparation of agreements with farmers	12152,00	7200,3	4951,70	12152,00
C.1	Restoration of habitat	2306620,00	805444,32	1501175,68	2306620,00
C.2	Re-introduction of grazing	864340,00	238076,64	626263,36	864340,00
C.3	Re-construction of access roads	215800,00	835,8	214964,20	215800,00
C.4	Restoration of habitat through seed sowing	14330,00	0	14330,00	14330,00

D.1	Biodiversity monitoring	14960,00	2502,65	12457,35	14960,00
D.2	Restoration success monitoring	6300,00	342,03	5957,97	6300,00
D.3	Socio-economic monitoring	7630,00	0	7630,00	7630,00
E.1	Media work	35730,00	6161,97	29568,03	35730,00
E.2	Training for farmers	16755,00	13356,31	3398,69	16755,00
E.3	Establishment of notice boards	50050,00	5060,8	44989,20	50050,00
E.4	Preparation of printed materials	24950,00	7971,35	16978,65	24950,00
E.5	Update of management guidelines	3850,00	52,87	3797,13	3850,00
E.6	Work with landowners	14562,00	4487,81	10074,19	14562,00
E.7	Web page	14426,00	2292,17	12133,83	14426,00
E.8	Working group for promotion of added-value products from alvar grasslands	4130,00	625,78	3504,22	4130,00
E.9	Layman's report	5402,00	0	5402,00	5402,00
F.1	Project management	37692,00	17119,77	20572,23	37692,00
F.2	Networking with other projects	15818,00	6436,29	9381,71	15818,00
F.3	After-Life conservation plan	0,00	0	0,00	0,00
	OVERHEADS	60368,00	23641,59	36726,41	60368,00

6. Annexes

Annex 1- the photos of project activities

Annex 2- local newspaper articles

Annex 3- project booklets

Annex 4- response to the Inception Report feedback

Annex 5- response to the Monitoring Visit feedback