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Case Study Database

BioClima

Mobilizing Private Investment for Biodiversity in **Lombardy**

Regions4
Sustainable Development

About this Publication

Introduction

"Call for BioClima" addresses the urgent challenges of biodiversity loss and ecosystems degradation in Lombardy, a region rich in natural heritage yet under pressure from industrialization, urbanization, and climate change. Through a public-private partnership, the initiative aims to mobilize coordinated action for forest and protected area conservation while bridging the funding gap, which hinders the achievement of the biodiversity goals set in the previous decade.

The project aligns with international biodiversity commitments, including the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF) 30 by 30 target, and demonstrates how regional leadership can translate global goals into tangible, locally relevant interventions.

Project Summary

The core idea consists of promoting the involvement of private firms in the financing of projects demanded by the managing bodies of regional parks. The initiative provided non-repayable funding to support actions for biodiversity conservation, climate change adaptation, and enhancement of ecosystem services in forests, protected areas, and regional ecological networks. The regional contribution covered up to 70% of project costs, while applicants were required to provide at least 30% co-financing, of which a minimum of 10% was required to come from private sources.

The initiative introduced an innovative blended finance approach, combining public grants, philanthropic support, and private co-financing to maximize environmental outcomes. The public-financing phase was completed in December 2025, whereas the private-financing component is still ongoing but it is planned to be concluded by the end of 2026. Projects were selected through a rigorous technical and administrative evaluation, ensuring that interventions generated measurable benefits for ecosystems, habitats, and species.

Key information

Location:
Lombardy, Italy

Area of Focus:
multilevel governance, mainstreaming of biodiversity, climate mitigation, ecosystem services, KM-GBF, biodiversity finance, public-private partnerships

Founded in:
2020

Investment:
More than US$5.816.975 were moved in total. US$4.066.741 were invested by the Lombardy Region, while more than US$2,326.790 resulted from private co-financing

Sustainable Development Goals Addressed:
13 and 15

Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework Targets addressed:
Target 2, 6, 7, 11 and 19

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Background and Context

The Lombardy Region

Area: 23,844 km²
Population: 10,033.918 (ISTAT, 2025)
Protected Areas: > 30%
Number of Parks: 24 regional parks, 101 supra-municipal parks, 3 state nature reserves, 67 regional nature reserves, 1 National Park

Case Overview

Lombardy is Italy's fourth-largest region, bordered by Switzerland as well as the Italian regions of Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol, Veneto, Emilia-Romagna, and Piedmont. It is one of the most densely populated European areas.

Hence, Lombardy is not only industry and cities. It is also nature, environmental protection, and biodiversity: in fact, it boasts the largest area of protected sites in Italy, a green heritage that represents the region's other soul—made of landscapes, nature reserves, and environments to preserve.

The region presents a great variety of ecosystems, habitats, flora, and fauna. Today, the network of protected areas in Lombardy is quite extensive. It includes 24 regional parks, 101 supra-municipal parks, 3 state nature reserves, 67 regional nature reserves, and 33 natural monuments, as well as a portion of Stelvio National Park, which is one of the largest in Europe. Furthermore, Lombardy comprises 3 Biosphere Reserves recognized under UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme. To conclude this overview, Lombardy also has the largest Italian river extension and lake surface area; in fact, 80% of Italy's freshwater is found here.

In this context, the main objective of Call for Bioclima was to reduce the biodiversity funding gap and promote nature-positive practices. Implementing actions aimed at conserving and restoring biodiversity and ecosystems has gained strategic importance as ecosystems provide services essential to the health and well-being of local communities. The initiative introduced a Public-Private Co-financing model, enabling local managing bodies with limited resources to implement costly conservationist or restorative actions and activate public-interest ecosystem services. In particular, the cooperation was finalized for the financing of forest interventions aimed at combating climate change and conserving habitats and species.

The legal framework, including the KM-GBF and EU Nature Restoration Law, significantly contributed to raising awareness among stakeholders, such as policymakers and entrepreneurs. Equally important were the region's natural and financial resources, and technical support from the facility "Etifor" which enabled the mobilization of private resources. Together with a favorable legal framework and strategic financial tools, these factors cleared the way for blended finance partnership to thrive. The Regional Government's commitment to public-private collaboration demonstrates how biodiversity conservation can be effectively integrated into development policies, strengthening resilience, safeguarding ecosystems, and ensuring long-term benefits for both nature and local communities.



Key Activities and Innovations

Biodiversity conservation and climate change resilience are tightly linked, as diverse habitats regulate climate, store carbon, and support adaptation. Climate change disrupts species–habitat interactions, reducing essential ecosystem services. Nature-based solutions can address both challenges. The Lombardy Region identified the need for a standardized and replicable method to measure ecosystem-service gains from natural-capital investments, enabling private entities to communicate this added value for Corporate Social Responsibility, environmental accounting, and marketing.

From this premise, in 2020, the Lombardy Region allocated €3.5 million (US$4.066.741) through Regional Law Number 9. The publication of the norm marked the start of the initiative Call for BioClima, which was developed in the framework of the project LIFE "IP GESTIRE 2020".

The initiative aimed to draft a new form of governance focused on the values of transparency, participation at different levels, and co-responsibility of both public and private subjects, therefore promoting an integrated approach in accordance with the EU Strategy for Biodiversity, which is oriented to the involvement of society as a whole. Call for BioClima favored the development of an innovative financing mechanism to support ecosystem services, enhance their resilience, and maximize the final results.

A long consultation process led to the adoption of the final design of an innovative blended finance mechanism, defined as a system that strategically uses public funding to attract private financing and achieve sustainable development results. **In this specific case, the blended -finance model was structured on two levels:**

***Local**, where each beneficiary generated certified positive impacts and received sponsorships from private companies operating in the area*[1]

***Regional**, where the public authority provided grants, integrating them with private sector financing and an economic model for enhancing ecosystem services*

Eligible participants

- *Nature 2000 site management bodies*[2]
- *Management bodies of protected areas pursuant to Regional Law 86/83*
- *Public administrations, including provinces, municipalities, mountain communities, unions of municipalities, metropolitan cities, and public consortia*

Required components for interventions

- *Principal forestry interventions*
- *Supplementary biodiversity protection interventions*
- *Supporting actions to enhance ecosystem services and monitoring*

Eligible investment expenses

- *Design and construction costs certified with invoices and payment orders*
- *Safety costs not subject to the auction discount*
- *Supplies necessary for implementation, if inventoried among the beneficiary assets of the organisation*

Interventions' objectives:

- *Improve the conservation status of habitats and species in line with the Regional Prioritized Action Framework (PAF) 2021–2027*
- *Increase the area of habitats that are beneficial for biodiversity conservation*
- *Strengthen the ecological network at the regional and local scale*[3]
- *Enhance green infrastructure in accordance with regional planning instruments*[4]
- *Increase the provision and economic valorization of Ecosystem Services*
- *Improve resilience of habitats and human communities to climate change*

Additional conditions were related to the amount disbursed. The minimum grant request per project was US$122,864, while the maximum was US$409,547. An advance payment of 57% of the grant amount was foreseen, with the balance due upon completion. Of the 18 proposed projects, 12 were selected following a technical and administrative evaluation.

The subsequent step was the publication of the ranking list of beneficiaries. The initiative included 20 Nature 2000 sites, 9 habitat types, and benefited 50 species across invertebrates, birds, amphibians, reptiles, and mammals. Ongoing technical and administrative monitoring was provided by the technical facility "Etifor" throughout implementation.

Local communities were actively involved through dissemination and awareness-raising activities, fostering participation, and long-term sustainability across diverse local contexts.

The public-financed works were completed in December 2025. Private co-financing activities remain ongoing and are expected to conclude one year later, ensuring continued environmental investment beyond the initial funding phase. In November 2025, the Call for BioClima received the Sustainable Development Award at the Ecomondo Fair. This recognition confirms Lombardy's strong commitment to sustainable development, climate innovation, and effective public–private cooperation.

[1] In March 2022, the call for applications was officially opened. During this phase, participants were assisted by the Cariplo Foundation.
[2] With the exception of private management bodies and ERSAF – Regional Agency for Agricultural and Forestry Services
[3] As defined by Regional Council Resolution no. 10962 of 30/12/2009.
[4] Regional Territorial Plan and the Regional Landscape Plan.

Environmental Impacts

The 12 approved and financed projects generated tangible and measurable results. More than 3,000 hectares were certified for responsible forest management, delivering verified positive impacts on ecosystem services. In addition, over 300 hectares of forest improvements were implemented, alongside more than 27 hectares of targeted interventions specifically aimed at enhancing biodiversity.

The projects supported the planting of over 66,000 trees, through reforestation activities, ecological enrichment, and the creation of linear ecological systems. Conservation actions protected 16 safeguarded habitats and more than 20 protected species.

Capacity-building was strengthened through training events attended by over 150 participants, focusing on responsible forest management standards and ecosystem service assessment methodologies. Dissemination and awareness-raising efforts included more than 20 public events involving citizens and businesses, as well as over 100 references in local and national media.

12 selected projects

- ***Valle del Ticino Regional Park**: This is Italy's first regional park, encompassing a mosaic of highly diverse natural and semi-natural environments. It implemented targeted conservation actions, including 28 hectares of forest improvement through invasive species removal and native planting, creation of wetlands, establishment of tree–shrub hedgerows, a birdwatching facility, and safety measures to protect avifauna from a high-voltage power line.*

- ***South Adda Park**: The South Adda Park stretches along the lower course of the Adda River to its confluence with the Po River, encompassing valuable natural areas such as forests, meadows, and wetlands. 13.7 hectares of forest were improved, including thinning, underplanting, and habitat tree creation, and dedicated 6.4 hectares to dry meadow conservation. Additional interventions included pollinator-friendly planting and the installation of two environmental monitoring stations to assess air pollutants.*

- ***Serio Regional Park**: The Serio Regional Park extends across the provinces of Bergamo and Cremona, along the Serio River to its confluence with the Adda. The park's territory alternates between agricultural and semi-natural areas and includes sites of historical and architectural interest. 3.9 hectares of forest were created through the planting of over 5,000 trees and shrubs, restored the functionality of an existing 1,139 m² wetland. Interventions included the construction of 8 small ponds for amphibians totaling 329 m², integrated under the canopy of the riparian forest. Among the amphibious species benefiting from the initiative is the Lataste's frog, an endemic species exclusive to the Lombardy-Veneto plain. Furthermore, the funds enabled the creation of hedgerows, tree clusters, and the sowing of permanent meadows.*

- ***Val di Mello**: The Val di Mello, located in the municipality of Valmasino (SO), is the largest natural reserve in Lombardy. Its alpine landscape, marked by significant altitudinal variation, hosts highly diverse environments, enriched by meadows, pastures, and alpine grazing areas. This variety provides an ideal habitat for numerous alpine species. 1.5 hectares were reforested with over 3,000 plants, and 33 hectares of forest were improved through thinning, ecological enrichment, invasive species control, and restoration of traditional dry-stone walls. These interventions respond to the progressive abandonment of traditional grazing, which has led to the reduction of fragile open habitats and a consequent loss of biodiversity. The restoration of dry-stone walls -recognized as UNESCO cultural heritage- contributes both to landscape preservation and to the protection of habitats for insects, amphibians, and reptiles.*

- ***Torbiere del Sebino (Wetlands of Sebino)**: The Torbiere del Sebino Nature Reserve, located just south of Lake Iseo, is a wetland of international importance. Depending on water levels, highly diverse environments form, together creating a complex and invaluable mosaic of habitats that host an incredible variety of species. In some areas, non-native species (i.e., species not originally present in this environment but introduced by human activity) of low ecological value have been detected, competing with native species. Over 4,500 trees and shrubs were planted, alongside the removal of undesired plant species. Ecological renewal was implemented through excavation and removal of material to recreate flooded marsh habitats, ensuring suitable conditions for 14 target species, including reptiles and amphibians, but also birds. Funds enabled the restoration and creation of small natural wetland areas.*

Remaining beneficiaries to BioClima's call	
Campo dei Fiori Regional Park	*North Oglio Regional Park*
Spina Verde Regional Park	*South Oglio Regional Park*
Orobie Valtellinesi Park	*Municipality of Canneto sull'Oglio*
Municipality of Martignana di Po	-

Socioeconomic Impacts

The initiative generated significant socioeconomic benefits across the region. The mobilization of regional and private funds addressed the long-lasting challenge of insufficient and irregular funding for ecosystem service maintenance. By introducing a structured co-financing model, the initiative improved long-term planning capacity for green area management.

More than 20 public field events engaged citizens and companies in awareness-raising activities, and the project received over 100 mentions in local and national media. Training sessions on responsible forest management and ecosystem service verification involved over 150 participants, strengthening institutional and technical capacity. Funds were used to activate or renew educational pathways, install information signage, and redevelop trails, enhancing the recreational and touristic appeal of forests. To better illustrate the socioeconomic impact of the initiative, some practical examples are outlined below.

In **Campo dei Fiori Regional Park**, the project focused on the restoration of 2.67 hectares of abandoned fruit chestnut groves and the rehabilitation of woodlands damaged by natural disasters. These actions are expected to help recover local agricultural and forestry resources and contribute to the improvement of hydrogeological safety for downstream settlements.

The **Spina Verde Regional Park** foresaw the establishment of a nursery for the self-production of native plant species to be used in future environmental restoration projects. In addition, an access trail to the wetland area had been created, featuring a wooden boardwalk and educational signage. These measures aim to promote environmental education and responsible use of the area, while also generating plant resources for future interventions.

In **South Adda Park**, two environmental monitoring stations had been installed to assess air pollutants through the analysis of pollinators and the honey they produce. The collected data were expected to be valuable for protecting public health and for enhancing the value of local agricultural products, particularly honey.

In the **Municipality of Canneto sull'Oglio**, forest thinning activities were carried out with the sale of the harvested material as wood chips to co-finance the interventions. This activity was accompanied by the creation of nature trails, improving accessibility and recreational opportunities while also establishing a source of revenue to support the self-financing of future projects.

Overall, the initiative strengthened the link between environmental conservation, sustainable development, and territorial enhancement, generating ecological, social, and economic benefits for local communities.



Policy Impacts

Call for BioClima represented a concrete instrument through which the Lombardy Region implemented existing environmental strategies defined at regional, national, and European levels.

The initiative was embedded within existing strategic frameworks, translating them into operational actions on the ground. In particular, it contributed to the implementation of the Prioritized Action Framework for Biodiversity (PAF) and to the Regional Strategies for Biodiversity and Sustainable Development of the Lombardy Region, strengthening the coherence between strategic planning and practical conservation measures.

At the same time, BioClima served as a laboratory for experimenting with new governance models. Developed within the European LIFE project "IP GESTIRE 2020," which aimed to define and implement an integrated strategy for managing the Natura 2000 network and biodiversity in Lombardy, the initiative tested innovative pathways to activate new financing mechanisms for biodiversity and ecosystem services.

The initiative was created in a context of growing global attention to the climate crisis and biodiversity loss, offering a practical and financially innovative response to the issues raised by international frameworks and agreements such as the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and the European Nature Restoration Law.

In particular, Call for BioClima contributed directly and tangibly to the implementation of the European Nature Restoration Law by translating its principles and objectives- including improvements to the conservation status of terrestrial ecosystems and protected habitats within the Natura 2000 network - into concrete place-based interventions. By restoring degraded ecosystems, strengthening ecological connectivity, and enhancing climate resilience, the initiative demonstrates how European policy objectives can be effectively implemented at the regional level.

Call for BioClima also contributed to strengthening the ecological functionality of the territory by improving ecological connectivity and enhancing the capacity of ecosystems to provide essential services, such as water regulation, mitigation of hydrogeological risks, and support for pollinators. These aspects are central to the Nature Restoration Law, which recognizes ecological restoration as a key tool for climate change adaptation and the reduction of natural risks.

A further element of coherence with European regulation lies in the adoption of ecosystem-based approaches, supported by monitoring and impact evaluation systems. In this way, BioClima not only advanced European nature restoration goals but also provided a replicable regional model for translating EU biodiversity policy into measurable environmental, climatic, and socioeconomic benefits.



Sustainability

The BioClima initiative mobilized a total of US$6.43 million to finance biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and ecosystem service enhancement across Lombardy.

Funding was secured through an innovative blended finance mechanism, built on a strong public–private partnership. The Lombardy Regional Government allocated US$4 million through the BioClima Call for Proposals under Regional Law No. 9/2020 (Piano Lombardia).

This public investment leveraged approximately US$1.72 million in private co-financing, mobilized through local companies interested in supporting projects with measurable environmental benefits.

Additional financial and technical support was provided by philanthropic contributions from Fondazione Cariplo, which strengthened the initiative's technical structure and complemented public resources.

The blended finance model operated at two complementary levels. At the regional level, public authorities provided non-repayable funding, integrated with philanthropic resources from Fondazione Cariplo, and an ecosystem service valuation model developed and managed by Etifor, which also delivered technical assistance. At the local level, beneficiary Managing Authorities secured sponsorships from private companies operating in the area, based on the certified positive impacts generated by the interventions.

Project continuity was supported by a robust governance structure and dedicated technical assistance. The Technical Facility Service, financed by Fondazione Cariplo and entrusted to Etifor supported beneficiaries at every stage of the process-from project design and application to the mobilization of private sponsors, including through the wownature.eu platform. This approach ensured that projects did not rely solely on initial public funding and strengthened their long-term financial sustainability.

The public–private partnership (PPP) model positioned BioClima as a cooperative financing mechanism for services of public interest. Long-term viability was further reinforced through the adoption of international standards for the measurement and verification of ecosystem service impacts. At the end of the implementation phase, a third-party certification is planned for responsible forest management and verified positive impacts across more than 3,000 hectares, enhancing credibility, transparency, and attractiveness for continued private investment.

Taken together, these elements positioned BioClima as an innovative and financially sustainable governance model capable of mobilizing diversified funding resources while ensuring environmental integrity.



Partnerships

Partnerships were fundamental to the implementation and success of the initiative.

Ente Regionale per i Servizi all'Agricoltura e alle Foreste (ERSAF) acted as the project's technical and administrative partner, playing a central coordinating role throughout the implementation process. As one of the main managing bodies of Natura 2000 sites in Lombardy, ERSAF contributed strong institutional knowledge and operational experience. Its involvement facilitated structured exchanges among site managers, promoting dialogue, peer learning, and the transfer of best practices.

By encouraging the sharing of strategies and technical know-how, ERSAF helped harmonize management approaches and optimize the use of available resources. This coordination reinforced alignment with regional objectives of the PAF 2014–2020 and improved the overall effectiveness of conservation measures.

The Cariplo Foundation was another strategic partner. Committed to supporting projects with strong social value, the Foundation played a crucial role in co-financing interventions, thus ensuring financial stability and continuity. In addition to its economic contribution, Cariplo Foundation provided valuable technical support to manage managing bodies of regional parks, assisting them in navigating administrative procedures and preparing high-quality project proposals.

Etifor, an environmental consulting firm originating from the University of Padua and now operating as a certified B Corp benefit corporation, provided specialized expertise. During the project, Etifor supported ecosystem service valuation, mobilization of private co-financing, dissemination activities, and certification processes. Its technical assistance was instrumental in bridging public objectives with private investment mechanisms.

Overall, the complementary roles of ERSAF, Cariplo Foundation, and Etifor ensured effective coordination, diversified financing, and long-term sustainability, delivering lasting environmental and social benefits.



Replicability and Key Lessons Learned

Although developed within the institutional and territorial context of Lombardy, BioClima represents a governance and financing model that is inherently transferable to other regions facing the biodiversity funding gap across Europe and beyond.

Rather than being tied to a particular ecosystem, the initiative was designed as an operational tool to implement broader environmental strategies through innovative public-private cooperation.

Its replicability is grounded in a set of key success factors:

First, BioClima relies on a solid regulatory and strategic framework.

Developed within the European LIFE project "IP GESTIRE 2020", it tested governance models capable of activating innovative financing mechanisms for ecosystem services. Replication therefore requires a strong and supportive policy environment at the regional and national level that prioritizes biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.

Second, an initial public financial commitment is essential.

In Lombardy, the regional government allocated $4.04 million through a dedicated regional law, providing the leverage necessary to attract private capital

Equally important is the blended finance approach as BioClima is built upon a strong public–private partnership model.

Public funding is used strategically to mobilize private and philanthropic resources to support forest management and habitat conservation. Local public authorities and protected area managers act as project implementers, while philanthropic actors and specialized technical partners provide essential support.

While the BioClima model is broadly replicable, interventions must be adapted to local ecological conditions.

The Lombardy experience demonstrates that ecological specificity must guide restoration design especially in such a varied ecosystem network, spanning alpine landscapes, floodplains, forests, wetlands, and agricultural areas.

Technical assistance plays a central role in supporting the process, including project identification, economic valuation of ecosystem services, impact certification, and the mobilization of private co-financing.

Measuring and certifying impacts requires highly specialized technical skills and external know-how. For replication in other contexts, ensuring access to universities, research institutions, or specialized companies capable of applying international standards is therefore essential to support local authorities and build investor confidence. Private sector involvement is another essential pillar. Attracting private co-financing depends on motivating companies to support nature-positive initiatives based on verified and certified impacts. Dissemination of activities and public events involving citizens and businesses proved essential in cultivating local community interest and private sector participation.

Finally, robust technical tools and methodologies such as monitoring systems and third-party certification are key to ensuring transparency, scientific credibility, and investor confidence.

By combining public leadership, private engagement, technical expertise, and impact verification, BioClima provides a practical and adaptable blueprint for regions seeking to close the biodiversity funding gap through nature-positive investment.

People

Nature

Nature

Territories

Solutions

Connection



Contributions

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For More Information

To learn more about this project, contact us by email at **info@regions4.org** to schedule an informational meeting, clarify your questions, and receive support for the implementation of similar projects.

Read more about the Parks, Biodiversity and Protected Areas Unit of the Lombardy Regional Government.

About Regions4

Regions4 is a global network of subnational governments driving action in climate change, biodiversity, and sustainable development. It was born in 2002 to represent states, regions and provinces at UN negotiations, European Union initiatives and global discussions on biodiversity, climate change and sustainable development. Today, Regions4 brings together 59 members across 25 countries, collectively representing 171 subnational governments reaching over 430 million people.

For more information: www.regions4.org

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