

SUMMARY

Water+Land+Scenary (WLS) is a Flemish climate-adaptation programme that empowers local partnerships to co-design and deliver practical landscape measures for drought, flooding, water quality and biodiversity. Coordinated by the Flemish Land Agency (VLM), it runs open calls where coalitions of farmers, landowners, municipalities and civil society submit area projects.

Launched through 14 pilots, the programme expanded in 2022 under the Blue Deal with 15 new area projects and eight system-innovation projects. WLS is a strategic instrument that links grassroots action to long-term land and water policy.



Source: VLAAMSE LANDMAATSCHAPPIJ (VLM)



CONTEXT

Flanders is a highly urbanised and intensively farmed region facing water scarcity, alongside flood peaks, soil erosion, declining water quality and biodiversity pressure. Droughts last longer, while heavy rainfall is more frequent, causing adverse effects to agriculture and nature.

Existing tools (compensation, relocating poorly sited functions) under-invest in **landscape resilience**. Water policy is organised by watercourse categories and often neglects the places where people live and farm, which is where infiltration and buffering must happen.



OBJECTIVES

- > Combine the objectives, knowledge and instruments of nine Flemish bodies around a shared vision: **careful management of soil, water and biodiversity**;
- > Provide **coordinated support** to farmers, water managers, landowners, nature groups and local authorities to achieve healthy agriculture, a sustainable water system and a robust landscape;
- > Fund and mentor **local coalitions** to choose their own pathways within the common vision;
- > Scale up **from pilots to a programme instrument** that informs wider Flemish water-security policy.

Themes: Governance; climate; nature and environment; soil health; land use

Country: Belgium

Organisation: Vlaamse Landmaatschappij (VLM)
– Flemish Land Agency, public authority

Start & end date: 2018- ongoing

Budget: EUR 35 million between 2018 to 2030

Funding sources:

- > Flemish funds for rural and land development
- > EU Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) via the Blue Deal (2020–2025)
- > Flemish funds for climate adaptation (Blue Deal 2025–2030)
- > Regional funds from provinces and communities
- > Private co-financing

Website: [Water-Land-Schap](https://www.water-land-schap.be)

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ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

- > **Setting the programme:** local coalitions of farmers, landowners, municipalities and civil-society actors apply to open calls with area projects tailored to their landscape. Coalitions are often convened by a local government, regional landscape or province. They lead on objectives and delivery and coordinate with co-users.
The VLM does not only fund or permit: it **brokers instruments, knowledge and capacities** so measures can be implemented on the ground. Partner universities assess climate risks, monitor impacts, and design research to support the integration of multiple functions (farming, nature, water, access) in each area.
- > **Start-up and pilots** (2017–2019): an initial open call launched **14 pilot areas under rural land-development rules**. Coalitions co-designed practical packages suited to their catchments – such as riparian strips, wet grasslands, level-controlled drainage, weirs and small retention, stream renaturation, small landscape elements and crop trials – with VLM brokering permits, advice and funding. Early demonstration measures tested feasibility and revealed local benefits.
- > **Scale-up under the Blue Deal** (since 2022): the Water+Land+Scenario (WLS) 2.0 programme expanded to **15 new area projects** and **eight system-innovation projects** (new governance models, planning and technical tools). Delivery ranges from street-scale pilots to valley-wide programmes in places such as the Upper Yser, Gete and Herk–Mombeek.
This phase includes EUR 16 million in targeted funding within a programme envelope of EUR 35 million up to 2030, combining EU, Flemish and municipal sources and private co-financing.



RESULTS

- > **Scale and coverage:** by 2025, **29 local coalitions** operate at different scales – from a single neighbourhood to half a province – implementing 33 projects across 370 503 ha (about 38% of Flanders' open space). Actions include infiltration and retention works, wet grasslands, riparian buffers, canal/ditch management, small landscape elements and level-controlled drainage, set out in an **integrated action plan for each area**, resulting in mutually reinforcing measures.
- > **On-the-ground delivery:** around **280 measures** have been implemented by 2025, including infiltration and retention works, riparian buffers, wet grasslands, stream renaturation, canal/ditch management, small landscape elements and level-controlled drainage, tailored to each the action plan of area.
- > **Early effects on the water system:** monitoring and expert assessment indicate that the combination of multiple upstream, land-based actions improve infiltration and storage, reduce run-off and erosion, and help protect water quality and habitats, complementing grey infrastructure.
- > **Coalition capacity and governance innovation:** **29 local coalitions** – from street-scale pilots to valley-wide programmes – implement **33 projects**. The Flemish Land Authority (VLM) brokers instruments, permits and knowledge; science supports risk assessment and impact tracking, and design research helps stack functions at site level.
- > **Investment leveraged:** under the Water+Land+Scenario (WLS) 2.0 programme, EUR 16 million targeted funding, within a EUR 35 million envelope up to 2030 drawn from EU (Blue Deal/RRF), Flemish, municipal, and private co-financing, support 15 area projects and eight system-innovation projects.
- > **Lessons from WLS inform the Flemish water policy** (Blue Deal / 'Resilient Waterland'). In the areas of Upper Yser, Gete and Herk-Mombeek, authorities set local damage limits, test high-impact climate scenarios, and turn these into clear action plans so delivery pace matches the level of risk.



SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

- > **Co-create across the whole landscape:** form led locally coalitions (farmers, landowners, municipalities) that plan and act toward one shared climate-resilience goal.
- > **Let locals steer investments:** give communities the lead on specific, area-based actions, within a clear regional framework.
- > **Build 'networks of action':** combine many small measures to scale up their effects across the catchment.
- > **Make learning continuous:** use simple self-evaluation to adjust plans and funding as conditions change.
- > **Match urgency with capacity:** set short, visible milestones and provide facilitation and training to help local coalitions adapt practices faster.



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