*The regulatory framework offered by the EU Green Deal opens up opportunities to better* *embed nature-based solutions such as "natural sponges" in the planning frameworks of member countries and establish them as a "standard solution".*

*Thus, a* ***demonstration project*** *can generate considerable leverage for scaling.*

*Together with partners, WI has already been able to make initial progress in anchoring the approach at the EU level.*

*At the same time, smaller pilot projects have already emerged in various European countries, but these often only take up parts of the approach, mainly addressing ecological but not macroeconomic aspects and impacts or opportunities, and are as yet only poorly networked and coordinated.*

*Wetlands International Europe will build on previous experience from other countries and will promote the approach at EU level and in member countries. However, Wetlands International Europe has not yet had the capacity to better network the various existing activities and to underpin the approach with its own demonstration project that can concretely show the opportunities and challenges.*

*In the course of the work so far, however, the Kyll and Moselle basins as tributaries of the Middle Rhine, which were some of the worst-hit areas of the 2021 flooding, have already been identified as promising project areas. Demonstrating the effectiveness of natural sponges and business models to fund sponge restoration in this region could therefore be a transformative step for upscaling the approach In Germany and at the EU scale.*

*The project funding will serve as "seed finance" both for the planned project activities and for the ambition to establish "natural sponges" as a standard solution within the EU in the long term.*

*The starting point of the project is a 2-year, two-track scoping phase, which on the one hand is* *to* *prepare a demonstration project and on the other hand is to bundle the momentum of existing activities of partners for policy and campaign work.*

*At the end of the scoping phase, there will be a project plan including location, partners, physical/hydrological baseline and policy analysis, as well as a stakeholder engagement strategy.*

*The core element of the budget for the scoping phase is a new Natural Sponges coordinator position. Additional costs incurred for stakeholder engagement, external studies on potential project sites, communication, etc.*

*Here several links of our previous work on this issue:*

*Pre -2021 background and history of natural sponges work:*

[*https://europe.wetlands.org/casestudy/restoration-of-marshes-in-rhine-basin/*](https://europe.wetlands.org/casestudy/restoration-of-marshes-in-rhine-basin/)

[*https://europe.wetlands.org/publications/sponge-restoration/*](https://europe.wetlands.org/publications/sponge-restoration/)

[*https://europe.wetlands.org/publications/wetland-restoration-impact-on-streamflow-rhine-basin/*](https://europe.wetlands.org/publications/wetland-restoration-impact-on-streamflow-rhine-basin/)

[*https://europe.wetlands.org/casestudy/stakeholders-support-natural-water-retention-measures/*](https://europe.wetlands.org/casestudy/stakeholders-support-natural-water-retention-measures/)

*JRC project results and synthesis report*

[*https://europe.wetlands.org/publications/micro-catchments-macro-effects/*](https://europe.wetlands.org/publications/micro-catchments-macro-effects/)

[*https://europe.wetlands.org/publications/natural-sponge-effects-in-the-german-middle-mountains/*](https://europe.wetlands.org/publications/natural-sponge-effects-in-the-german-middle-mountains/)

[*https://europe.wetlands.org/casestudy/wetland-restoration-scenarios-to-determine-ecosystem-services-trade-offs/*](https://europe.wetlands.org/casestudy/wetland-restoration-scenarios-to-determine-ecosystem-services-trade-offs/)

*Articles:*

[*https://www.dw.com/en/opinion-germany-needs-to-invest-in-nature-to-defend-against-floods/a-60607186*](https://www.dw.com/en/opinion-germany-needs-to-invest-in-nature-to-defend-against-floods/a-60607186)

[*https://europe.wetlands.org/blog/can-natural-sponges-help-defend-europe-against-floods/*](https://europe.wetlands.org/blog/can-natural-sponges-help-defend-europe-against-floods/)

[*https://europe.wetlands.org/news/lessons-learned-from-the-floods-in-germany-one-year-later/*](https://europe.wetlands.org/news/lessons-learned-from-the-floods-in-germany-one-year-later/)

*Stoming web platform with GIS analysis*

[*https://media.stroming.nl/sponges/*](https://media.stroming.nl/sponges/)