

Restoring Habitats In Estuaries



LIFE08NAT/E/000055 PROJECT
Restoring habitats of Community interest
in estuaries of the Basque Country



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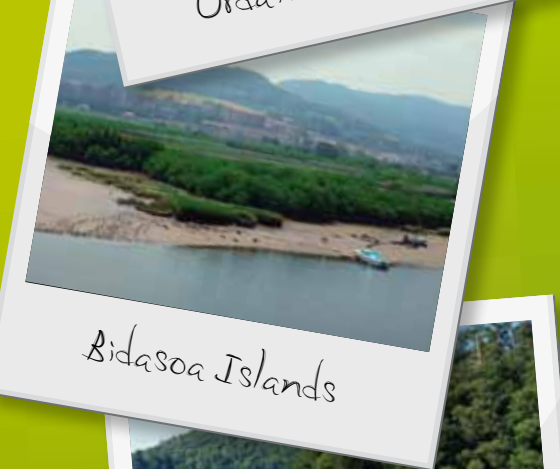
Estuary habitats suffer a great number of pressures and threats, including the proliferation of invasive exotic plant species. The "Restoration of habitats of Community interest in estuaries in the Basque Country" programme aims to recover these habitats in the estuaries of Urdaibai, Txingudi and Lea, which are affected by the expansion of the invasive exotic plant species *Baccharis halimifolia*.

This project is co-funded by the European Commission, through the LIFE-Nature programme, and the Basque Government Department of Environment, Land Planning, Agriculture and Fisheries. The project is managed through the Public Environmental Management Authority, Ihohe.



Urdaibai Marsh

This is the best preserved estuary on the Basque coast, which includes a large variety of ecosystems and is the only Biosphere Reserve in the Basque Country since 1989. The areas affected by *Baccharis halimifolia* cover more than 290 hectares.



Bidasoa Islands

Located in the Txingudi area, a key point for the migration of a large number of birds, it preserves remnants of original marsh vegetation, in a heavily developed area. *Baccharis halimifolia* invades the islands dikes, occupying around 5 hectares.



Lea Estuary

This estuary, although small in surface, is the estuary that has suffered the lowest level of modification on the whole Basque coast. It is home to an abundant number of some characteristic marsh species. The invasion of *Baccharis halimifolia* is still emerging, and already occupies approximately 0.5 hectares.



The three estuaries are included in the Natura 2000 network, which is the Europe-wide network of protected natural spaces. It aims to safeguard the most representative habitats and species in Europe.

The threat:

Invasión of Baccharis halimifolia

The *Baccharis halimifolia*, an invasive exotic plant species originally from the Atlantic coast of North America, was introduced for ornamental purposes and has extended along the European Atlantic coast, from Brittany to Asturias. The spaces included in this project are threatened by this plant because:

It is a great coloniser. It can produce up to 1.5 million seeds per plant, which can disperse at a great distance. It has a high growth rate during its young stages and it tolerates salinity, as well as temporary floods and droughts.

It is a transformer species. They have the ability to alter the physical characteristics of the soil and cause important damage to biological diversity as they modify the natural dynamics of ecosystems, displacing native species.

It mainly establishes in high marsh areas, affecting natural habitats such as saline reeds, reed beds, arable land and alluvial forests.

The alteration of these habitats *directly affects a large number of protected bird species* such as the aquatic warbler (*Acrocephalus paludicola*), endangered throughout Europe, the great reed warbler (*Acrocephalus arundinaceus*), the great bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*), the common spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*) or the osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), as it provokes the degradation of their areas of feeding, resting and breeding.



The project actions

To deal with this problem, the LIFE project undertaken by the Basque Government plans to develop actions aimed at eradicating the invasive plant in the 3 areas of the project, as well as raising public awareness and spreading the results. The main actions are:

- 1** *Eliminating the masses and specimens* of *Baccharis halimifolia* from the whole area, which will entail the recovery and improvement of around 300 hectares of estuary habitats.
- 2** Once the invasive species has been eliminated, we will support the *natural colonisation by the native species of the habitats to be restored*, by sowing and planting in the areas affected.
- 3** *Specific monitoring of the results of the project*, as well as the effectiveness of the methods used.
- 4** *Public awareness campaigns* on the problem of the estuary habitats, by editing leaflets, guided tours of the project areas and recreational activities such as photography competitions, among others.
- 5** *Spreading the results obtained*, through technical conferences and by creating an international commission with representatives of the regions affected by a similar problem.

*Baccharis
halimifolia,
invasive,
especies.*

For more information on the project, visit:
www.euskadi.net/life_estuarios



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