A PROTECTION STRATEGY FOR THE FLOODPLAINS OF THE RIVER YZER
(FLANDERS, BELGIUM)

Ann de RYCKE\textsuperscript{1)}, Koen DEVOS\textsuperscript{1)}, Bruno SAMAIN\textsuperscript{2)}, Marc SAS\textsuperscript{2)}, Kris DECLEER\textsuperscript{1)}

\textsuperscript{1)} Institute for Nature Conservation, Kliniekstraat 25, 1070 Brussels, Belgium; ann.de.rycke@instnat.be; koen.devos@instnat.be; kris.decleer@instnat.be;

\textsuperscript{2)} International Marine & Dredging Consultants N.V. Wilrijkstraat 37-45, B4, 2140 Antwerp, Belgium; Bruno.Samain@imdc.be; Marc.Sas@imdc.be

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Abstract

The Yzer is a lowland river, which rises in Northern France and discharges into the North Sea in western Flanders (Belgium) with a catchment area of 1101 km\textsuperscript{2}. In the downstream part, the river has been canalised and embanked for navigation. Along the middle section of the river the original, wide floodplain was preserved and still floods several times every winter. This floodplain area has a high ecological value and was designated as Ramsar and Special Protection Area under the EU Bird Directive. Due to large peak run-offs during the last decade, several times also houses and farms were endangered. An integrated project for flood protection of houses and nature restoration was elaborated.

Aiming at a policy of integrated water management, the Flemish Waterways and Maritime Affairs Administration (AWZ) spends more attention for nature conservation and restoration than in the past. The Institute of Nature Conservation was contracted to elaborate nature rehabilitation scenarios for the different Flemish waterways. Within social, economic and ecological preconditions, realistic targets for nature restoration and development are formulated. Basic principle is to develop a sustainable ecosystem, neutralizing the bottlenecks as much as possible, providing (more) space for dynamic fluvial processes, and restoring the relation between river and floodplain. The aim is to (re)create and restore diverse wetland, floodplain and river habitats.

This article focuses on the hydrological and ecological features of the River Yzer and describes the protection strategy for the river and its wetlands within the framework of integrated water management.