1. Introduction

On the basis of the objectives given in the budget remarks this work programme contains
the actions to be financed and the budget breakdown for year 2022 as follows:

a) For procurement (point 2),
b) For grant (point 3).

Legal basis: Article 58(2)(a)(b) of Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 2018/1046

Budget lines: 09 21 02, 09 22 01, 09 22 02

Objectives pursued

09 21 02 Pilot project - Best Belt - more power for the Green Belt

The objective of this pilot project is to further unlock the local potential and provide *inter alia* training and capacity building along the European Green Belt. Building on the success of the BEST (voluntary scheme for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Territories of European overseas) initiative\(^2\), a similar scheme for such services is being implemented along the European Green Belt through the pilot project of 2021: Best Belt – more power for the Green Belt. This pilot project of 2022 will be implemented through an amendment to the existing grant agreement\(^3\) with the beneficiary EuroNatur\(^4\), chair of the European Green Belt Association.

09 22 01 Pilot project – Biodiversity-climate nexus fund

Climate change and biodiversity loss are interdependent. Climate change impacts the ecosystems and changes the habitats of species, which impacts their ability to survive. The more the temperatures rise, the fewer species will be able to survive. On the other hand, poor ecosystem health exacerbates the effects of climate change, when healthy ecosystems mitigate the impacts of climate change. Still, climate change gets much more attention in the public debates compared to biodiversity. Through carbon offsets and compensations, it is in principle possible to better link climate to biodiversity. Currently, many voluntary offset schemes exist, but there is no guarantee of their real-life impact and they risk to be greenwashing. This pilot project would explore how the climate offsets and compensations,

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\(^3\) Grant Agreement No 09.200100-P092102/2021/855776/SUB/ENV.D.2 - “Pilot Project – BEST BELT more power for the European Green Belt”

and maybe Emission Trading System in the future can be linked to directly benefit biodiversity conservation and restoration.

09 22 02 Preparatory action – EU Grassland Watch

This preparatory action builds on the recent successful completion of a pilot project⁵ that delivered an Earth Observation based system ("EU Grassland Watch"⁶) for monitoring land cover land use changes, with a focus on detecting grassland degradation and losses of grassland areas in Natura 2000 sites. The public website displays grasslands losses at European scale, but also provides details for individual Natura 2000 sites, including annual land cover data updates from the date of entry into force of the Habitats directive⁷ until present. The purpose of the preparatory action is to develop this system further by extending the mapped and monitored area, improving the quality of automated land cover identification from remote sensing imagery, and improving the quality and relevance of indicators on grassland-related land use changes. These objectives cannot be achieved through technical improvements only, they will also require an active engagement with the community of users.

Expected results

09 21 02 Pilot project - Best Belt - more power for the Green Belt

This pilot project is expected to help further unlock the local potential for biodiversity action including through small grants, capacity building and outreach activities involving organisations in the region and through training and education of young volunteers/jobseekers for biodiversity and ecosystem services. It will provide opportunities for activities for designation and management of protected areas, also exploring the synergies with climate change adaptation and mitigation measures. It shall raise awareness for the importance of biodiversity by connecting activities for ecosystem preservation and restoration with information given to tourists travelling the Iron Curtain Trail.

09 22 01 Pilot project – Biodiversity-climate nexus fund

This pilot project is expected to provide insight in current offsetting schemes and explore how the climate offsets and compensations, furthermore, Emission Trading System perhaps in the future can be linked to directly benefit biodiversity conservation and restoration.

09 22 02 Preparatory action – EU Grassland Watch

This preparatory action is expected to contribute to a robust collection of data on natural and semi-natural grasslands in Europe and to continue the activity of a pilot project⁵ that provided the monitoring protocol to be followed. The preparatory action aims also to get closer to the community of users: this innovative approach, absent from the initial project, should encourage a better adoption of the system by stakeholders, and also help feedback to the EU Grassland Watch developers in order to ensure that the evolution of the “EU

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⁵ Pilot Project 09 18 02 - Using satellite images to improve the operation of the Natura 2000 network
⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/eu-grassland-watch/
Grassland Watch” reflects the actual needs. The main expected result is of this preparatory action is, therefore, that the existing EU Grassland Watch web portal is significantly scaled up in terms of quality, quantity, reliability, and policy relevance of the information that it provides to the public.

2. **Procurement**

The overall budgetary envelope reserved for procurement contracts in 2022 amounts to EUR 2 500 000. IT development and procurement strategy choices will be subject to pre-approval by the European Commission Information Technology and Cybersecurity Board.

2.1 Preparatory action – EU Grasslands Watch

**General description of the contracts envisaged**

One contract is envisaged, awarded by means of an open call for tenders. The envisaged tasks are related to two main activities: improve the current mapping, monitor the capacity, put in place in EU Grasslands Watch, and engage with stakeholders.

The improvement of the existing earth observation system concerns in first place the extension of the mapped domain. For now, only 3800 Natura 2000 sites are monitored: the total number of monitored sites should be greatly increased. The performance of the monitoring system and its accuracy will also have to be improved: the addition of ancillary information (derived from Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS), Land Use and Coverage Area Frame Survey (LUCAS), etc.) will be considered to improve the results robustness and to better distinguish permanent from temporary grasslands or managed from natural/semi-natural. The information the current system delivers about grasslands potential degradation will have to be improved and extended, for example to include land abandonment, an improved usage of the ploughing and mowing indicators, or to provide indicators of degradation at the level of a Natura 2000 site.

The EU Grassland Watch should become a reference platform for EU, national and local stakeholders concerned with the protection and restoration of grasslands in Europe. It is, therefore, essential to identify and engage with these stakeholders, through a series of workshops and communication events, with the goal of training them on the use of EU Grasslands Watch and getting their feedback to improve the system and better serve their own application and business use cases. The public website will also evolve to take account of the improvements as described above.

**Implementation**

These actions will be implemented under direct management by the Directorate-General for Environment.

3. **Grant**

The overall budgetary envelope reserved for grants in 2022 amounts to EUR 2 240 000.

3.1 Pilot project - Best Belt - more power for the Green Belt
**General description of the subvention envisaged**

This project is a continuation of an existing grant\(^9\) awarded in 2021 to EuroNatur on the same subject. It aims to extend the small grant and other activities\(^10\) of the BEST Belt\(^11\). This pilot project of 2022 shall be implemented through an amendment to the existing grant agreement implementing the pilot project of 2021: Grant Agreement No 09.200100-P092102/2021/855776/SUB/ENV.D.2 titled “Pilot Project – BEST BELT more power for the European Green Belt” with the beneficiary EuroNatur, the chair of the European Green Belt Association\(^12\).

With reference to the Financing decision 2021(C)1856 of the pilot project of 2021, adopted on 24 March 2021, the direct award is in accordance with Article 195 (f) of Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 2018/1046\(^13\). Under the responsibility of the authorising officer by delegation, the recourse to an award of a grant without a call for proposals is justified because the action has specific characteristics requiring a specific type of beneficiary for its technical competence, specialisation or administrative power.

**Implementation**

These actions will be implemented under direct management by the Directorate-General for Environment.

**3.2 Pilot project – Biodiversity-climate nexus fund**

**General description of the subvention envisaged**

One grant agreement following an open call for proposals is envisaged. The grant shall deliver an overview on existing voluntary offset schemes and their functioning and explore how the climate offsets and compensations, and maybe emission trading systems in the future, can be linked to directly benefit biodiversity conservation and restoration and how to guarantee their real-life impact and to decrease the risk to be greenwashing. The co-funding rate shall be 95%. The usual criteria (admissibility, eligibility, operational and financial capacity) will be applied.

The award criteria shall be as follows:

1. Technical coherence and quality in relation to the specific need addressed (minimum threshold 35 points maximum 40 points),
2. Comprehensiveness of the approach in relation to the specific need addressed (minimum threshold 25 points maximum 30 points),
3. Financial coherence and quality (minimum threshold 25 points maximum 30 points).

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\(^9\) Grant Agreement No 09.200100-P092102/2021/855776/SUB/ENV.D.2 titled “Pilot Project – BEST BELT more power for the European Green Belt”.


\(^12\) [https://www.europeangreenbelt.org/initiative/association/](https://www.europeangreenbelt.org/initiative/association/)

\(^13\) Article 195 Exceptions to calls for proposals Grants may be awarded without a call for proposals only in the following cases:

(f) for activities with specific characteristics that require a particular type of body on account of its technical competence, its high degree of specialisation or its administrative powers, on condition that the activities concerned do not fall within the scope of a call for proposals.
Implementation

These actions will be implemented under direct management by the Directorate-General for Environment.