

RIVER CONTRACTS IN THE WALLONIE REGION OF BELGIUM FOR A SUSTAINABLE AND COLLECTIVE WATER MANAGEMENT

Started in 1993, [the innovative practice of River Contracts in the Wallonie Region \(Belgium\) is applied to the entire territory](#), hence creating a considerable positive impact on the water management of rivers through the active participation of local actors. [To date 14 River Contracts cover 96% of the Wallonie territory.](#)

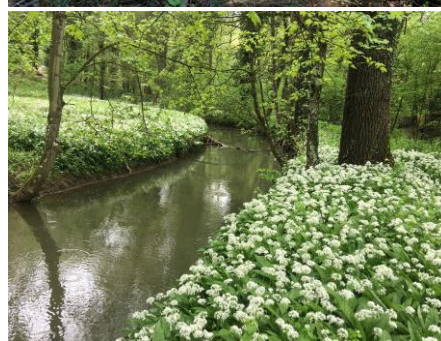
The territory of the Wallonie Region includes four *River Basin Districts* (Escaut, Meuse, Rhin and Seine) and 15 *sub-hydrographic basins*, areas where all the rainwater converges to the same point of the stream by borrowing a network waterway. The River Contracts are implemented at the level of each *sub-hydrographic basins*.



[A River Contract consists of mobilizing all the stakeholders in a hydrographic basin](#), with a view to defining a shared vision of the problems and a Plan of actions to restore the rivers, their surroundings and the water resources of the basin, included its landscaped function. Representatives from the political bodies, public administrations, water management services, schools, companies, associations and all other organized territorial actors are invited to participate in this process.



A River Contract covers many aspects linked directly or indirectly to the watercourse: quality of surface water and groundwater; flood risks management; river restoration and concerted management; land use planning in the valley; nature conservation and the preservation of aquatic ecosystems; landscape management; economic activities related to water; agriculture and forestry; tourism and recreation; river transport; waste management; information and public awareness; educational activities on the theme of water.



In the Wallonie Region, 14 River Committees were constituted involving the government bodies and ensuring a strong participation of eco, cultural, and sports associations. The River Committees realize the following activities:

- Promote a shared vision so that the competent authorities commit to restore and/or preserve the water quality of rivers and groundwater, to enhance the landscape and natural resources of their surroundings.
- Establish working groups to find pragmatic solutions to various water-related issues (floods, agriculture, litter, land use planning, etc.). The working groups develop and agree upon a common vision, objectives and action plans for future implementation.
- Coordinate concrete actions (river banks management and recovery, lifting of obstacles to the free movement of fish, fight against floods, fight against invasive plants, waste collection and disposal, etc.) with the active participation of all local actors.
- Define the terms of the Contracts, which represent a formal act



through which public and private actors as well as associations commit to carry out all those planned initiatives through technical, financial and operative assistance for the achievement of the overall planned objectives.

The preparatory phase of a Rio Contract always implies the collection of all necessary technical information, conducting specific studies, analysis and diagnosis of the river basin conditions and problems that may incur: pollution, waste, erosion, wastewater discharges, invasive plants, etc. These studies also include analysis of the potentialities of the rivers: sources of exceptional biodiversity, remarkable heritage, etc. However, all technical aspects identified by the experts are discussed with local people who have an exhaustive perception and understanding of the territory.

Participation in the River Contracts is voluntary and the success of each of the experiences depends on the Committee's ability to involve the largest number of local actors and to implement initiatives that bring benefits to all. [In the Wallonia Environment portal, the 14 River Contracts are presented](#) through their web and Facebook pages. Through these tools it is possible to appreciate the common elements of the practices, as well as the wide variety of initiatives that River Contracts can generate according to the specific needs of each territory and also according to the type of support, creativity and innovation that stakeholders can commit on.

At regional level, the 14 River Contracts, which employ more than 50 full-time professionals, [have reached a considerable positive impact on the local water and river management during the past 3 years \(2016-2019\)](#):

- 11,000 km of rivers inventoried and 29,600 degraded water courses analyzed to find the best solutions.
- 900 partners (including 215 municipalities and 5 provinces) involved in carrying out more than 9,300 actions to resolve the degradations recognized.
- About 1/3 of these initiatives are concrete field actions carried out with the active participation of local actors.
- More than 2 campaigns organized every day in Wallonie to raise public awareness of the impact of their environmental actions.
- 45,000 people made aware of the water-related issues. The 14 Contract Rivers are managing for example the common campaign *Here begins the sea*, for the preservation of seas and oceans. Through plaques placed at various places in the municipal territories, they encourage citizens not to dump household waste in the drains: cigarette butts, cotton swabs, wipes, oils, grease, leftovers of meals.

The first River Contract was implemented in France at the beginning of the 80's and thanks to the results obtained this methodology is now being adopted in other European countries. In this context, by implementing the River Contracts in its regional policy and in the entire territory through the active participation of local actors, the Wallonie Region of Belgium represents a point of reference.

The management of an essential common good such as water is a challenge for all territories of the world and the experience of the Wallonie Region shows a way to address it taking into account its complexity and also creating a framework to agree on the use of water resources according to the different needs of citizens, farmers and entrepreneurs. This practice can inspire other local governments to replicate their innovative environmental management methods for a future of sustainable development.



To know more

[Environnement Wallonie Portal](#)

[Contrat de Rivière brochure](#)

[14 River Contracts in Wallonie Environment](#)

[Guide to establish a River Contract](#)

[Journées wallonnes de l'Eau](#)

[Brochure - guide eaux de pluie](#)

[Maisondelapeche.be](#)

[Contrats de Rivière – Territoires en mouvement 2015- in journals.openedition.org](#)

[Article in sillonbelge.be](#)

[Article in gs-esf.be](#)

