



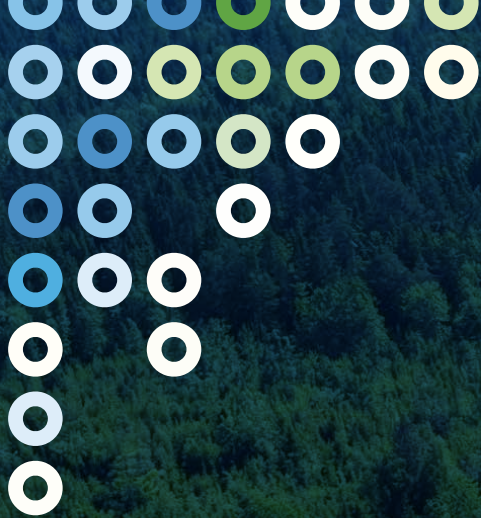
GRIP *on* LIFE



TOGETHER FOR SUSTAINABLE WATERCOURSES

How action plans were developed
for the Lyckebyån and Mieån rivers



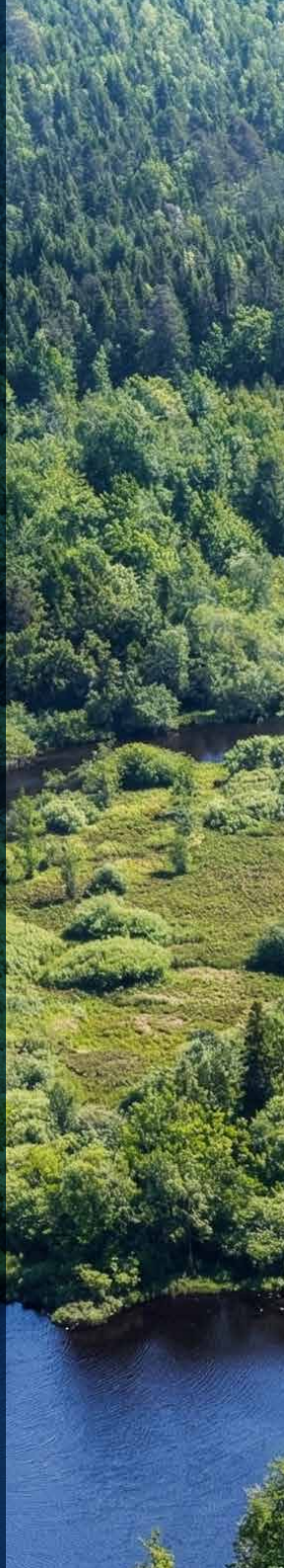


INTRODUCTION

COLLABORATION AROUND THE MIEÅN AND LYCKEBYÅN

The water in our rivers is a complex issue. Different interests influence how land and water are used, and within a catchment area everything is interconnected. What happens upstream affects life downstream. How can sustainable solutions be created in landscapes where many interests meet?

In Blekinge, the Lyckebyån and Mieån rivers have been the focus of a collaborative process that has been tested with the aim of bringing together knowledge, perspectives, and responsibilities.



An aerial photograph showing a winding river, Lyckebyån, flowing through a dense, lush green forest. The river is a prominent blue ribbon that curves through the landscape. The surrounding forest is thick with various shades of green, indicating a healthy ecosystem. In the foreground, there is a cleared area with exposed brown soil and some fallen logs, suggesting recent logging activity. The overall scene is a beautiful natural landscape in Blekinge, Sweden.

Lyckebyån, near the lake Värmasjön, winds like a blue ribbon through the beautiful forests of Blekinge.



Therese Stenholm Asp, facilitator of the collaborative process



VALUABLE WATERCOURSES

Mieån and Lyckebyån are two of Blekinge's most valuable watercourses, both from a societal perspective and in terms of their ecological value. Both have been affected by human activity – Mieån primarily through channel clearance for timber floating and migration barriers, and Lyckebyån through altered hydrology resulting from wetland drainage and the lowering of lake water levels.

Against this background, a collaborative process was carried out between 2019 and 2024 to develop measures for the rivers' catchment areas. The process was led by the Länsstyrelsen Blekinge (Blekinge County Administrative Board) and Skogsstyrelsen (the Swedish Forest Agency) and aimed to create sustainable action plans together with landowners, public authorities and stakeholder organisations.

The collaborative process concerning the two watercourses formed part of the Grip on Life project, whose overall objective was to improve environmental conditions and habitats for plants and animals in watercourses and wetlands within forest landscapes.

THE COLLABORATIVE PROCESS IN BRIEF

- Period: 2019–2024
- Scope: Lyckebyån and Mieån
- Purpose: To develop action plans and establish long-term management
- Approach: Collaboration between multiple stakeholders

HOW THE WORK WAS CONDUCTED

Länsstyrelsen och Skogsstyrelsen began by inviting stakeholders to a kick-off event on collaboration around the two rivers. The purpose was to inspire key stakeholders to take part in efforts to promote the sustainable use of Mieån and Lyckebyån.

Guest speakers contributed to the event, and participants took part in an exercise based on the question: “What does Mieån/Lyckebyån mean to you?”. Participants were also given the opportunity to express an interest in taking part in the ongoing collaborative process.

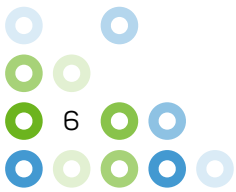
Two working groups were then established, one for each catchment area, with 8–12 participants in each group. The groups included representatives with a range of interests, including private landowners, landowner organisations, municipalities, water and wastewater companies, water management associations, water councils and voluntary organisations. They were also joined by representatives from various public authorities and experts in river restoration and hydromorphology, which measures how aquatic environments function physically.

CONSERVATION STANDARDS

The groups’ work was based on the Conservation Standards methodology, a structured approach to planning and implementing conservation initiatives. The method is based on analysing problems, setting objectives and evaluating results step by step.

It helps participants to understand complex relationships between causes and effects so that appropriate measures can be implemented. Participants identify what needs to be protected, what threats exist, and how they can be addressed. Priorities are determined based on both the severity of the issue and the potential to influence it, resulting in clear and measurable objectives that participants feel responsible for achieving.

The collaborative process for Mieån and Lyckebyån was carried out through a series of workshops, complemented by field visits and knowledge-sharing activities. The work was led by a facilitator, known as a “coach”, with extensive experience of the Conservation Standards methodology.



1. CONCEPTUALISE AND REVIEW

- Define the purpose of the planning process and the project team
- Define the scope, vision and objectives
- Identify critical influencing factors
- Analyse the conservation context

2. PLAN ACTIONS AND MONITORING

- Define objectives, strategies, assumptions and intermediate objectives
- Develop an action plan
- Develop a monitoring and evaluation plan

5. CAPTURE LEARNING AND SHARE KNOWLEDGE

- Document the learning process
- Share knowledge
- Promote a culture of learning

CONSERVATION STANDARDS PROCESS STEPS

4. ANALYSE AND ADAPT

- Prepare data for analysis
- Analyse results
- Adapt the strategic plan

3. IMPLEMENT AND MONITOR

- Develop a work schedule
- Develop and refine the budget
- Implement action plans

EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

Effective collaboration is built on the joint development of knowledge among the stakeholders involved. When different perspectives come together, a broader understanding emerges. In this process, this was achieved through shared discussions in which experiences and local perspectives were exchanged.

An important prerequisite is that trade-offs are made collectively. Throughout the process, participants discussed which issues and measures should be prioritised. Public authorities need to refrain from deciding unilaterally which actions are the right ones and instead enable meaningful influence from other stakeholders.

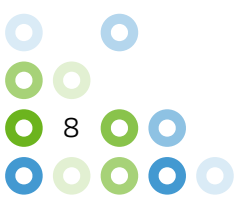
KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

A successful collaborative process depends on a number of factors. In this case, many of them were present. The work was guided by a clear vision and a long-term ambition.

The purpose was clearly defined and based on measures for which the stakeholders themselves assumed responsibility. The focus was therefore on establishing effective management structures.

The process was based on democratic dialogue and a way of working that fostered trust. Discussions took place in an open and non-judgemental atmosphere. Shared ground rules helped reduce hierarchies.

A key element was collective learning. Participants gained a greater understanding of one another's perspectives and became more aware of both differing viewpoints and the complexity of the issues involved. This helped to change attitudes and increase respect for other interests. Knowledge was created within the group rather than delivered from above.





The collaborative groups held several workshops, sometimes outdoors in natural settings, allowing participants to reflect together on complex issues

RESPONSIBILITY AND PARTICIPATION

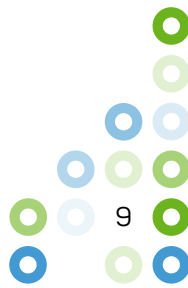
The work was characterised by flexibility and adaptation throughout the process. When knowledge gaps or conflicts arose, themed presentations or dedicated meetings were organised.

Place-based meetings played an important role. Walks along the watercourses and joint field visits created opportunities for learning and reflection. Participants were able to present their own land, strengthening the participants emotional connection to the area and increasing the sense of responsibility and involvement.

The work also had a clear mandate, and EU funding made it possible to carry out the process on the scale required. At the same time, there was an understanding that the final outcome was not predetermined, allowing space for an open and learning-oriented process.

SUCCESS FACTORS

- Clear vision and long-term ambition
- Democratic dialogue and a trust-building approach
- Shared learning (transformative learning)
- Flexibility and adaptation throughout the process
- Place-based meetings and field visits
- Mandate and resources





THE WAY FORWARD

RESULTS AND CONTINUED WORK

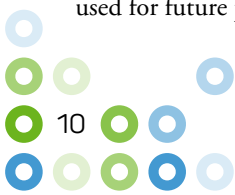
Several participants in the process describe how the work became increasingly collaborative over time. It became easier to support solutions that benefit the watercourses, even when those solutions did not always align with their own individual interests.

Surveys showed that participants' fundamental views had not changed, but their knowledge had increased – both regarding the work of public authorities (for example the Action Plan for the Habitats Directive, the Prioritised Action Framework (PAF) and Natura 2000) and regarding the perspectives of other participants.

The results have been documented in the MIRADI Share programme, which will also be used for future planning and management.

THE WAY FORWARD

The objective of the long-term management of the action plans was to establish a solution that can function over time without Skogsstyrelsen and Länsstyrelsen Blekinge retaining primary responsibility. The collaborative groups will continue their work to implement measures, address threats to the watercourses, and monitor progress towards agreed objectives. Further information will be published on a website currently under development.



MIEÅN

Mieån catchment area is largely characterised by spruce forest, but also includes mixed coniferous and broadleaved woodland as well as deciduous forest with valuable broadleaved species. A distinctive feature of the area is the small-scale agricultural landscape in the river valley, with pollarded trees, wet meadows and wooded meadows with grazing. Together, the Mieån collaborative group identified the river's principal ecological conservation values:

- Forest with dead wood and a high proportion of deciduous trees
- Small-scale agricultural landscapes with wet meadows
- Water reservoirs and water-retaining wetlands
- Flowing watercourses with good connectivity
- Freshwater pearl mussel and brown trout

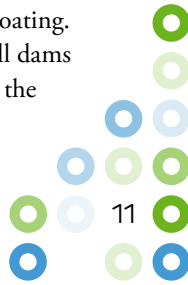
The natural values of Mieån and their long-term conservation are threatened primarily by forestry practices that lack sufficient environmental consideration, as well as by a shortage of deadwood in both forests and watercourses. The river is also affected by historical straightening and channel clearance, together with flow regulation and migration barriers.

LYCKEBYÅN

Lyckebyån is one of the largest watercourses in south-eastern Sweden. The river flows through three counties, beginning in Kronoberg County and emptying into the Baltic Sea in Blekinge. Land use within the catchment area is dominated by forest, interspersed with agricultural land. Together, the Lyckebyån collaborative group identified the river's principal ecological conservation values:

- Lakes
- Flowing watercourses
- Groundwater
- Transitional habitats and slow-flowing stretches
- Wetlands (peatlands)
- Diverse forests
- Cultural and agricultural landscapes

During the 20th century, extensive areas of wetland were drained and lakes were lowered in an effort to create agricultural land. In addition, Lyckebyån was cleared and straightened to facilitate timber floating. Several hydropower dams and mill dams remain along the river, restricting the free movement of fish and other aquatic species.



THE PROJECT GRIP ON LIFE

The Grip on Life IP ran from 2018 to 2025 and received funding from the European Union's LIFE IP programme. Within the project, public authorities, forest owners' associations and stakeholder organisations worked together to combine active forestry with consideration for valuable watercourses and wetlands within forest landscapes. A major focus of the project was the development of new and improved methods for collaboration, forestry practices, forest management, and the restoration of watercourses and wetlands.

In Blekinge's collaborative groups, the following representatives participated:

Lyckebyån Water Management Association, Emmaboda Municipality, Karlshamn Municipality, Karlskrona Municipality, Lyckebyån Water Council, Mieån Water Council, The Swedish Anglers Association Blekinge, Lyckebyån Fisheries Conservation Association, The Federation of Swedish Farmers (LRF), Södra, Swedish Outdoor Association, The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, Karlshamn Branch, Blekinge Arkipelag, The Swedish Forest Agency (Skogsstyrelsen) and subject specialists from the Blekinge County Administrative Board (Länsstyrelsen Blekinge).



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