

RENATURATION IN THE FLOODPLAIN OF THE PO RIVER: RESULTS AFTER 10 YEARS INTERVENTIONS ON THE INITIATIVE OF PRIVATE FARMS

Paolo Cielo (ForTeA studio associato, Torino, Italia - fortea@fortea.eu), Fabio Pesce (ForTeA consulting SARL, Lyon, France - fortea.consulting@fortea.eu)

Recent regulatory developments and land policy identify river floodplains as areas of special natural value and of public interest for the hydraulic steering, imposing limitations on traditional agricultural and forestry practices. The farms that grow poplar in floodplains are realizing the particular value of this environment, and look for new opportunities, expanding their economic horizon to agri-tourism activities and enjoyment of the environment.

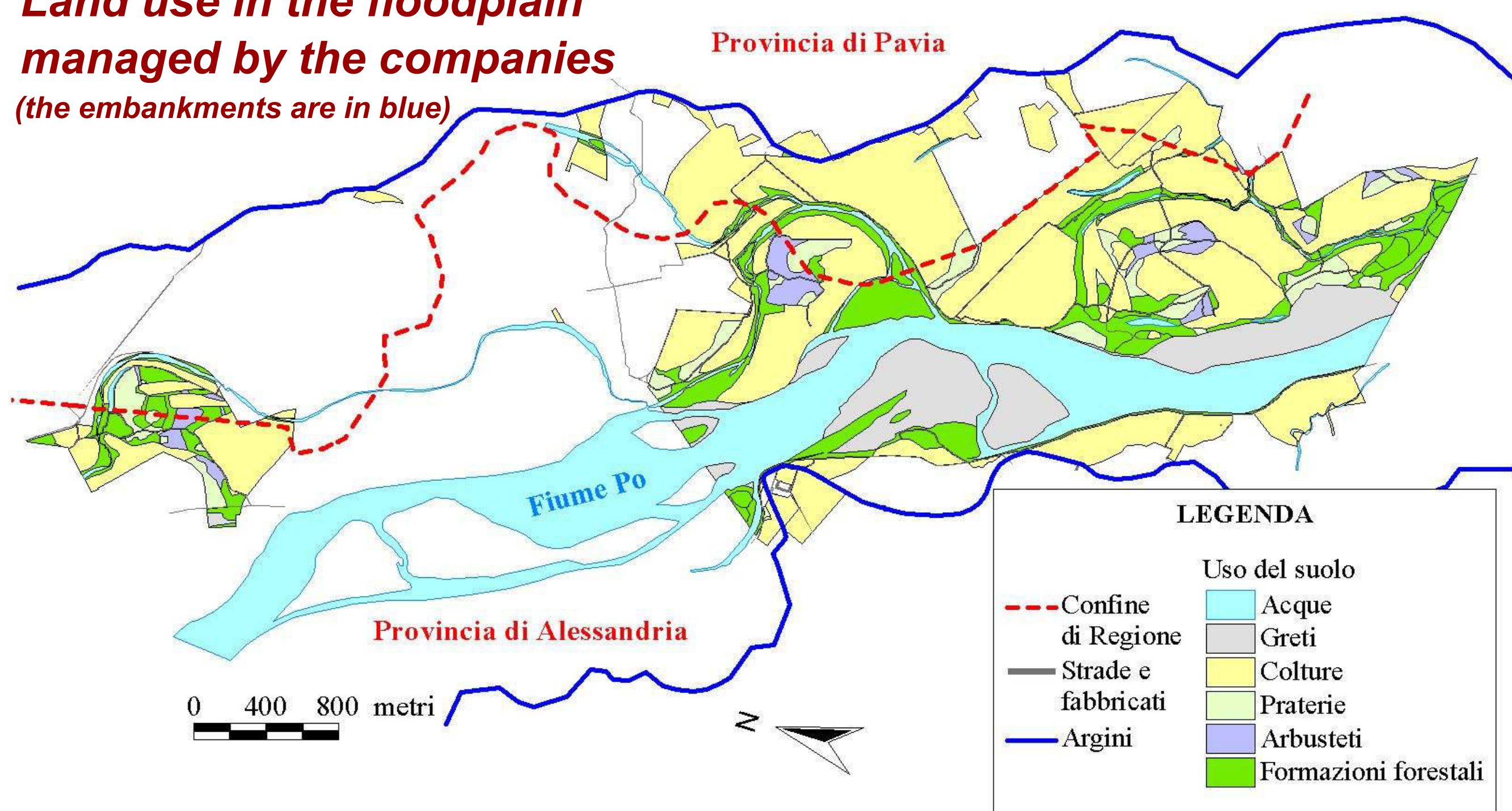
In the past ten years two companies located along the Po river (totalling about 1.250 hectares between Piedmont and Lombardy, in A and B bands of the sub-Plan of Fasce fluviali, in protected area sites and the Natura 2000 network) have drawn Management Programs of the river area inside the farms' boundaries, requiring state-owned land in concession free of charge for recovery and environmental restoration according to Decree 11/5/99 n. 152.

The Programs were submitted to the park body of "Parco fluviale del Po e dell'Orba", the Interregional Agency for the Po river- AIPO and the Basin Authority, receiving positive advices.



In medium to long cycle plantations are also used locally rare or extinct species (in this case *Quercus robur*)

Land use in the floodplain managed by the companies
(the embankments are in blue)



The Programs, articulated in sub-plans, aim for a zoning bands according to decreasing degree of naturalness from the Po main course towards the embankments, with the succession of natural or semi-natural forest to medium - long cycle wood tree plantations to get to the short term poplar plantations grown under environmentally friendly techniques.

The Programs include the creation of buffer zones between natural and semi-natural areas and those areas with high productive vocation, relocating the latters inland as less susceptible to flooding, together with the conservation and improvement of natural areas, increasing the physical stability and ecological characteristics of habitat for wildlife.

The Programs are being implemented. Table on the right shows the highlights of the main actions carried to date.

The Programs proved to be suitable instruments for the recovery and enhancement of floodplains, permitting the continuation of agricultural activities. They gained interest among the authorities involved, as being coordinated interventions from a pilot and private initiative.

The companies ruling the farms took advantage of public grants - in particular from the European Union - and their own resources. The regular financing of interventions could be resolved by agreements with the public bodies which are variously entrusted to environment maintenance but lack departments for execution.

Cultural practices in forest stands (including experimental interventions for the renewal of riverine forest in critical condition for the strong development of exotic shrub species)	30 hectares
Wood plantations with indigenous tree (and shrubs) species on land already planted with poplar and cereals	90 hectares
Preservation and creation of hedges and rows	3500 meters
Conservation of wetlands	18 hectares
Set-aside of fields once cultivated with cereals, to permanent grassland	8 hectares

