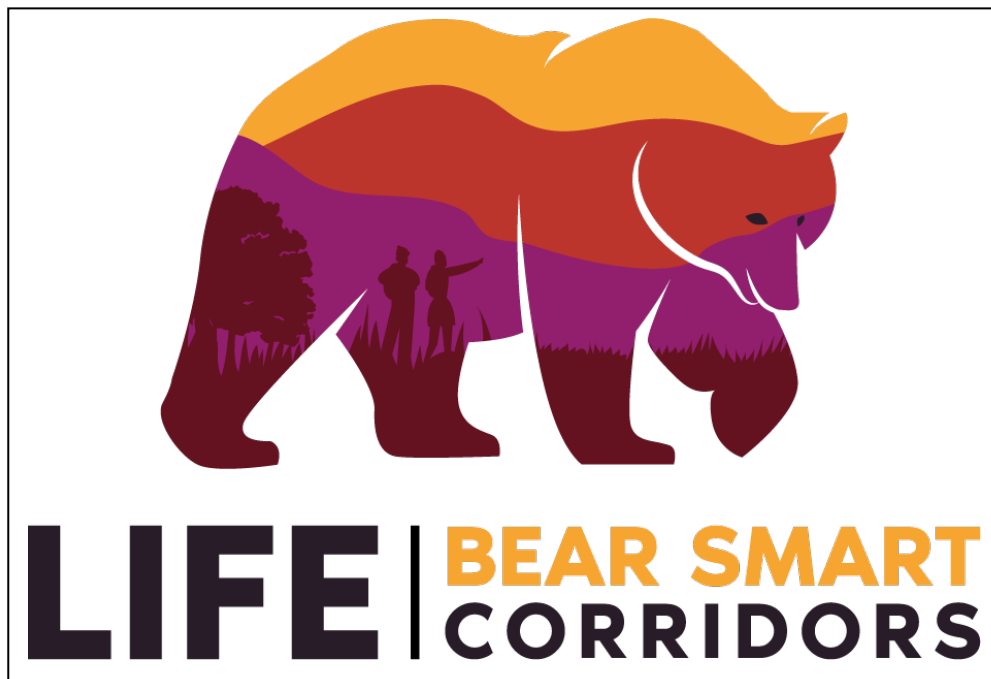




LIFE20 NAT/NL/001107
LIFE Bear-Smart Corridors

REPORT OF STAGE 3 OF CEW
E5 Capacity Enhancement Programme



September 2024

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Introduction

The present report was produced in the frame of Action E5 of the LIFE Bear Smart Corridors project, which started in 2023 with a capacity enhancement programme.

The action E5 is a continuation of the action A5, which produced a socio-economic analysis of the landscape (landscape business plan - LBP) in which the different BSCs are located, in the central Apennines, Italy. Through to the LBP, RA started to engage with several entrepreneurs in the landscape, who have been invited to participate on a voluntary basis to a capacity enhancement programme. The goal is to create a business network, involving local partners.

The following report includes the main highlight of year 2025, in which RA conducted the final steps leading to the creation of the Coexistence Network. The report describes more in details the work around the creation of the brand identity for the network and a dedicated platform to list products and services available within the project area.

2025 marked the end of the capacity enhancement programme, with two final workshops executed and the launch of the business network in the project area.

The last two workshops focused on the creation of a new brand identity for the network, designed by project partners with the support of a professional graphic designer. One of the main concerns expressed during the programme by the entrepreneurs has been the lack of consistent communication and marketing tools available across the area: this has led RA to allocate funding to create a new social media profile entirely dedicated to the network, with the creation of a digital archive, documenting the work carried out across bear smart communities and beyond, with focus on products and services offered within the region. The new account, will consistently highlight tourism products available throughout the year, as well as commercial/cultural events dedicated to the network. The work of documenting each business has kicked off in the summer of 2025 and will continue well after the end of E5 action.

Between March and September 2025 RA has worked with local business to plan and execute thirteen events, in order to animate the network and generate economic impact to local communities.

In August 2025, during the first BSC festival, the network was officially launched with a dedicated space where over 250 people joined a bespoke guided tasting, to learn about the different products available in the network. A dedicated brochure was presented to each of them.

Furthermore, RA, in collaboration with RE, has designed a new booking platform called Wilder Places, which has started to list all products and services available within the landscape. By September 2025 more than 12 products are listed on the platform with an ongoing number of options being added. The focus is mostly on BSC, with a few other products available on other more general topics dedicated to wild animals.

Finally, another annual agreement in 2025 has been signed with outbound TO Exodus Travel with 65K allocated to rewilding and BSC actions. Beyond the existing agreements reported in the second report of the E5 action, RA has received two more proposals from two additional travel companies (Keep The Planet and Liberty International) for 2026.

THE CAPACITY ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMME – 2025 WORKSHOPS

Updated timetable of the workshops

TIMELINE	ACTIONS	LOCATION	DESCRIPTION
March 2023	Soft launch meeting	Bespoke visit to each BSC	First informal meeting between RA and entrepreneurs to present the whole project
May 2023	First Team Building Session with Wildlife Adventures	The session took place in Ortona dei Marsi on the 28 th	The first training session on the ground to explore one of the ecological corridor and understand the work that goes into nature conservation and rewilding
June 2023	Bear biology and coexistence practices	Online	RA
TIMELINE	TOPIC	LOCATION	ANIMATOR
October 2023	The economics of a bear smart community	Civita d'Antino	RA
November 2023	First Bear Fund Network	Rome	RA
May 2024	Responsible communication	Villetta Barrea	RA and PNALM
June 2024	Outdoor session on Brand identity	Bisegna	RA and PNALM
October 2024	Presentation of the results of the brand identity workshop – first draft of the logo	Online	RA
February 2025	Marketing of the new IG account	Villetta Barrea	RA & PNALM
June/July 2025	Preparation of the launch of the network	In person meetings	RA
TIMELINE	ACTION	LOCATION	DESCRIPTION
August 2025	Second Bear Fund Networking Event	During the first BSC Festival	A dedicated event to present the network

In 2025 two final workshops were held in the project area in the following dates:

- On February 27th held in Villetta Barrea to introduce the graphic designer and plan the work with each business;
- Between June and July 2025, several in person meetings took place both to plan the launch of network during the BSC Festival, as well as onboarding business onto the new dedicated platform (Wilder Places);
- On August 2 – 3rd RA executed the first BSC Festival in the municipality of Vastogirardi;

The Coexistence Network

The workshops held in Villetta Barrea in collaboration with PNALM gathered 18 entrepreneurs distributed across the various BSC to create a dedicated marketing strategy following the requests emerged in 2024.

Most of the business highlighted the lack of consistent marketing tools to market the central Apennines as a destination, and while business within the protected areas typically received more economic benefits than those outside of them, businesses inside corridors areas are struggling to access route to markets.

As a result of this, RA, in collaboration with RE, has allocated further funding to hire a professional graphic designer who met all business present during the meeting, and agreed a common approach to promote products and services within the project area.

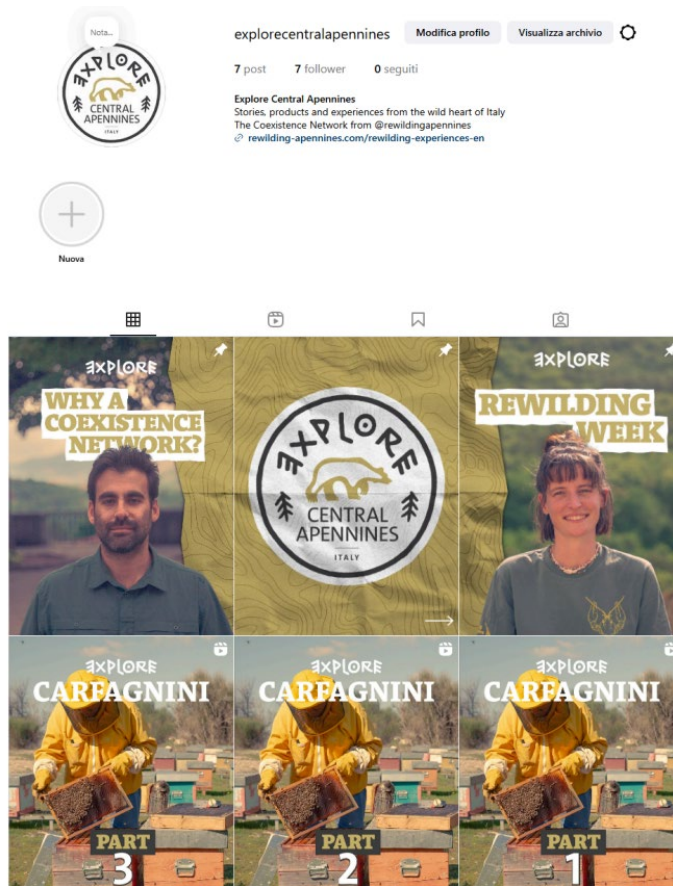
In the summer of 2025 15 businesses out of 37 have been interviewed and 4 videos for each business have been planned (three short videos for IG and one long version for YouTube). Each video will aim to inform about the story of the person ,the product and the place, in order to highlight the link with the environment and how they contribute to it. These videos will help to market the network and tourism products in the project area and funding outside the LIFE initiative will be used to continue supporting the economic initiative.

Regarding the creation of a logo for the network, a change has occurred in comparison to 2024, whereby some project partners expressed some criticism towards the adoption of the Chimera as a symbol. Given the context in which the initiative is being developed, the use of a fictitious animal, and the potential references to the adoption of non-scientific practices within the initiative, have prompted project partners to use a more conservative approach and avoid the use of mythologic animals. Conversations with local members have resulted in the following option, following the brand manual of RE and the branding presentation from the graphic designer (available in the folder).



The new logo network

The IG account will be entirely dedicated to the social and economic aspects of the initiative and will be focused on marketing tourism products, commercial and cultural events and every opportunities travellers will have to visit and support local communities.



A screenshot from a draft version of the IG profile

Beside this digital space for the network, more promotional material is being developed, starting from a brochure dedicated to the members and the different tourism products available in the project area.



The brochure aims to inform the public about the BSC initiative and how supporting the network everyone can support the development of bear smart communities

Events and tourism products in 2025

Beyond the work carried out with in the capacity enhancement programme, RA has worked in 2025 to conduct a number of events to support the development of the network and the larger initiative.

Below, a summary of the activities:

Date	Place	Activity
March 23 rd	Sirente Velino Regional Park, Stiffe	1 st 2025 edition of RURALE farmers market
April 7 th – 12 th	Gioia dei Marsi, Ortona dei Marsi, Pettorano sul Gizio	Mario Rigoni Stern Institute from Bergamo with 50 students
April 25 th	Avezzano	Avezzano Rugby annual gathering
April 23 rd	Villetta Barrea and Scanno	New Bearleaders tour with Hotel degli Olmi bearleaders.com/hosted-experience/hotel-degli-olmi-rewilding-europe
April 23 rd – 27 th	Central Apennines	First 2025 Rewilding Week
May 7 th – 11 th	Central Apennines	Exodus Press Tour https://rewildingeurope.com/blog/tourism-helps-people-and-wildlife-thrive-together-in-the-central-apennines/
May 18 th – 23 rd	Pescasseroli, Pettorano sul Gizio, Ortona dei Marsi	First Italian Walks and Wildlife 2025 Tour https://www.exodustravels.com/trips/italy-holidays/walking/italian-apennines-walks-wildlife/tir
June 15 th	Sirente Velino Regional Park, Stiffe	2 nd 2025 edition of RURALE farmers market
July 9 th – 13 th	Pettorano sul Gizio, Vastogirardi, Morino	Second 2025 Rewilding Week
August 2 nd – 3 rd	BSC Vastogirardi	First Bear Smart Community Festival and launch of the Coexistence Network
September 21 st	Sirente Velino Regional Park, Stiffe	3 rd edition of RURALE farmers market
September 21 st – 26 th	Pescasseroli, Pettorano sul Gizio, Ortona dei Marsi	Second Italian Walks and Wildlife 2025 Tour
September 29 th – October 4 th	Core area of the Marsican brown bear and Gran Sasso National Park	1 st Tour with the Ultimate Travel Company, dedicated to the Gran Sasso National Park

In addition to the experiences above one more Rewilding Week is scheduled for October 15th – 19th.

Each of the experience with out-bound tour operator and the rewilding weeks have been designed to devote a percentage of each product to the Bear Fund. Business plans for each experience are developed with DMC Wildlife Adventures. Donations from all trips between end of 2024 and 2025 resulted in over 7000 euros for the Bear Fund.

A highlight on 2025 has been the first Bear Smart Community Festival held in the municipality of Vastogirardi, where the Coexistence Network has officially launched in front of stakeholders of travellers.

For the occasion, RA created a dedicated space to the network, with a special tasting of all products available and a focus on artisanal cheese and fermented products. Over 250 people attended the curated tasting and learnt about the larger initiative of the bear smart community.



A shot of the curated space dedicated to the Coexistence Network during the BSC Festival in Vastogirardi



The tasting was free for each participant who had a chance to meet directly the producers involved from the network

RETE DI IMPRESE PER LA COESISTENZA

un "ecosistema" di realtà imprenditoriali responsabili che scelgono di investire in un modello in cui natura ed economia sostengono a vicenda.



ARTIGIANI

Pescasseroli, latte di capra, pasticceria tradizionale.
Duca Arte - Vastograndi,
Lanciano - Santa Stefano di Sopo,
Il Forno di Costano - Villetta,
La Casa di Casa - Crapalano,

OPERATORI TURISTICI

Cooperativa Valdiana - Pettorano sul Gizio, servizi turistici.
Bifolgo del Simoli - Borelle,
Cooperativa Dambrosius - Molise, servizi turistici.
Villetta Advanturo - Pescasseroli, servizi turistici.
Bifolgo Campitelli - Alfedena, ristorazione e pernottamento.
Il Castelluccio - Socca nel Marsi, pernottamento.
Il Ciardicchio - Pettorano sul Gizio, pernottamento.
La Fontana - Pettorano sul Gizio, pernottamento.
Castel di Socca - Agropunta Sarno, pernottamento.
Posta Sile - Pettorano sul Gizio, pernottamento.
Hotel Degli Orsi - Villetta Barrea, ristorazione e pernottamento.
Hotel Villapane - Gizio dal Gurgone, esperienze di turismo.
De Nove U - Villetta Barrea, pernottamento e ristorazione.

PRODUTTORI

Zacchar - Barrea, allevatori e produttori di formaggi di capra a latte crudo.
Casali de Fontana - Vastograndi, paste in latte crudo.
Al. Agostino Pisci - Pettorano sul Gizio, Magnoli (ceneri della transumanza).
Fattoria San Felice - Vastograndi, paste latte a latte crudo.
Antico Monastero Di San Pietro - Villalago, ortelli e prodotti di montagna.
Al. Agostino Petrone - Castel del Monte, pecorino a latte crudo.
Milione, Vecchia - allevatori e produttori di formaggi di capra a latte crudo.
Melagato - Ortana del Marsi, produttore di vino di uva.
Amalfitano - Socca, allevatori e produttori di carne bovina e latticini.
Castello Casidani - Ahila, prodotti di vino, olio del Marsi, produttore di castore.

RISTORATORI

Rio Pane - Sile, lounge restaurant.
Anita Osteria Zakarwan - Città d'Antico.
Le Chiedi - Carbio.
Il Fondaio, Pettorano sul Gizio.
Castello Chiesa Madre - Santa Stefano di Sossano.
Alfa Casa Vecchia - Pescasseroli.

A new map to describe the network was available for consultation




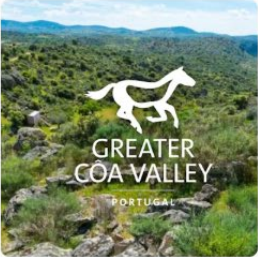
With the end of the Capacity enhancement programme RA is continuing to map opportunities for financial support for the network, both in terms of creating more education moments for the members to increase their knowledge regarding bear smart communities and the link between wild animals and tourism, as well as increasing the number of trips available within the project area. Beyond more conventional tourism products, RE and RA have also worked in 2025 to launch a new platform dedicated to the network, with no intermediaries.

Launch of Wilder Places

Wilder Places <https://www.wilderplaces.com/> is a European marketplace specializing in experiences, accommodations ("stays"), multiday tours ("multiday experiences"), and daytime experiences in wilderness landscapes. The goal is to promote "rewilding" tourism—i.e., immersion in regenerated or recovering natural environments, biodiversity, wildlife, sustainability, and local community involvement. In the first semester of 2025, RA has worked to start onboarding the first listings onto the platform and will continue until the end of 2026.

Rewilding landscapes

Our rewilding landscapes are at the heart of Rewilding Europe's mission to restore nature and support local communities. Spread across the continent, these unique areas showcase the power of rewilding—where wildlife thrives, ecosystems recover, and nature-based tourism offers unforgettable experiences. Each destination invites you to explore the comeback of wildlife, connect with wild nature, and support a wilder future.



More about the **Greater Côa Valley**

More about the **Southern Carpathians**

More about the **Central Apennines**

More about the **Velebit Mountains**

Listings from the Greater Côa Valley

Listings from the Southern Carpathians

Listings from the Central Apennines

Listings from the Velebit Mountains

At the launch of the platform 4 landscapes from RE are available on the website for consultation and bookings

Some of the key features of the platform relate to:

- Accommodations in refuges, rural accommodations, historic villages, old houses, castles, and nature experiences.
- Accommodations often have limited amenities, and connectivity can be weak or absent; the charm lies in the "disconnection," in nature.
- Support for conservation initiatives and sustainable tourism.

At the launch of the network, in August 2025, Wilder Places displays 12 results in the specified area. Here they are with key details:

#	Type	Name/Offer	Area	Price/Info	Point of interest
1	Stay	Campitelli mountain hut (Wildlife Adventures)	Near Pizzone BSC	€40 per night	Mountain hut
2	Stay	Terraegna mountain hut (Wildlife Adventures)	Core area	da €40 per night	Renovated lodge-style structure with limited amenities (hot water, solar electricity, poor internet access) surrounded by nature; a base for excursions
3	Experience multiday stay	Canadian Canoeing through rewilded Abruzzo (Wildlife Adventures)	Core area	from €20 for canoeing activities; likely also includes overnight accommodation or hiking components.	An active experience in nature, suitable for those seeking more dynamic activities.
4	Stay	Rifugio dei Sanniti in the heart of Abruzzo's wild beauty	Corridor area	€60 per night	A more “robust” refuge, with more services
5	Experience	Cider Tasting Experience Melagusto	Corridor area	Around €40	Gastronomic experience in nature: food, local flavors, less focused on accommodation.
6	Experience	Cheesemaking Experience & Lunch – A Journey into Wild Italy (TrippinMolise)	Corridor area	Around €45	Gastronomic/cultural point, surrounded by nature.
7	Stay	Il Castelluccio – Stay in an ancient medieval castle	Lecce nei Marsi BSC	€380 per night	It is a very impressive structure: ancient castle, probably luxurious/restored, remarkable panorama.
8	Daytime Tour	Italy's Big Five (Wildlife Adventures)	Corridor area	€156 per day	A day tour focused on wildlife and ecosystems (bear, wolf, deer, etc.).
9	Daytime Tour	Wolf Tracking in Abruzzo (Wildlife Adventures)	Corridor area	€155 per day	Specific wolf spotting/searching activity, probably with expert guides.
10	Stay	Dimora Medoro – a charming 20th-century Italian residence (TrippinMolise)	Corridor area	from €349 per night	Elegant structure, high comfort, more premium target.
11	Stay	Da Nonna Li – Historic Village Stay in Nature (Rooms & Breakfast)	BSC V. Barrea	€110 per night	A small B&B, surrounded by nature, offers an excellent balance between comfort and a rural experience.
12	Multiday Experience	Rewilding Week – Rewilding Apennines	Corridor area	€885 for the whole week	Full-immersion experience: multiple days, varied activities, likely multiple

At the launch of the platform these are some of the opportunities, as well some of the challenges faced:

STRENGTHS

- **Variety:** Options range from low-cost (simple lodges, day trips) to luxury (castles, historic residences), catering to a diverse range of audiences.
- **Authentic experiences:** immersion in nature, often in national parks, wild environments with wildlife, minimal comforts as part of the charm, far from mass tourism.
- **Sustainability:** Many facilities use renewable energy, adopt low-impact practices, and are managed in collaboration with local communities. For example, Terraegna is solar-powered, uses limited vehicles, and pays attention to the natural environment.
- **Support for rewilding:** Offerings go beyond recreation, including education, awareness-raising, and the promotion of wildlife and biodiversity. Experiences such as wolf tracking and Italy's Big Five.

WEAKNESSES

- **High costs for certain options:** Premium experiences (castles, weekly) are very expensive, which may exclude those on a limited budget.
- **Limited comfort / weak infrastructure:** Many amenities are minimal—poor electrical systems, little or no mobile connectivity, and sometimes limited or no showers. This can be a problem for some users (especially families or those with specific needs).
- **Seasonality:** Many refuges are only open during certain periods (spring/summer/autumn). Some facilities require advance reservations, and do not guarantee opening outside of season.
- **Accessibility:** Some facilities can only be reached on foot or by mountain bike, presenting logistical challenges; they are not suitable for those seeking absolute comfort or those with limited mobility.
- **Variable information:** Detailed descriptions are often only in English, or vary greatly from listing to listing; sometimes photos, reviews, transportation, and ways to get there are missing.

The idea of a dedicated platform was brought to the attention of several network members, some of which have promptly listed their products on the website, while others are still in the process of uploading their listings. While the whole process has been positively received, it has highlighted how some providers are facing difficulties with the process of having to upload their product on a digital space, due to the lack of familiarity with the world of booking platforms. As a result of this, RE has appointed a dedicated person from central team, to support the providers in the process. The goal is to reach a more organic number of listings available for the IBA conference in 2025, which will present the final results of the BSC initiative.

Information About existing listings is available at the following link <https://www.wilderplaces.com/s?bounds=43.92855605%2C15.47574423%2C39.79720697%2C11.46667436&mapSearch=true>

New 2025 partnership agreement with Exodus Travels



In order to expand the number of trips available with the network and raise more funding for the bear fund a new partnership agreement was signed off in 2025 between RA and TO Exodus Travels.

From the summary of the project we report the goal of the collaboration as determined in the partnership agreement:

*“The **“Project”** is to further extend the work on wildlife corridors in the central Apennines in Italy and support rewilding and carbon sequestration through dedicated actions. In particular, the Project will involve, without limitation, wildlife monitoring, preventive measures and rewilding actions specifically focusing on areas of Apennine land known to support the endangered Marsican brown bear. Support will continue for existing rewilding initiatives in the areas of Castel Madama and the Bear’s Valley, as well as allocating more land across the corridor areas or other selected areas of relevance to the purpose of this agreement. The Project will also expand work around natural grazing and build on established methodologies to determine its potential for measured carbon sequestration. In addition to the work carried out until now, the project will aim to rewild an addition 300 hectares on land in central Apennines in 2025”*

As a result, 65.000 euro have been additionally raised for bear smart community actions and profits generated from the tours “Italina Walks and Wildlife” have been added to the Bear Fund, resulting in an additional 5000 euro.

The existing collaboration with Exodus Travels has continued to prove its strategic importance although, at the same time, it has highlighted that donation based trips are need to be planned with more than one actors. Considering the way these tour are developed (with profits being donated to the local NGO), the TO is not making any profits out of these trips and, hence, is not encouraged to increase the number of trips. The result in the need from project partners, to activate other tourism collaborations with other TO, instead of having to rely purely on one collaboration. This is considered to be an important lesson learnt within this initiative and should be referenced for all those partners who are aiming to replicate enterprise development strategies within their project areas in the future.

One key lesson learnt from these type of partnerships is the limited capacity from the tour operator to increase the number of trips in the area, if they continue to design donation based experiences with low or zero profit making mechanisms. This means that the enterprise network cannot exclusively rely on one single partnership with a single TO but, on the contrary, needs to increase the number of collaborations to achieve the optimum number of trips within the area.

By the end of the action E5, Ra has been able to activate several tourism collaborations, resulting in over 10 annual trips with an increasing number of requests to activate new products. Beyond the existing ones (Ultimate Travel Company, Much Better Adventures, Exodus Travels) two more tour operators will be evaluated in the following months:

Liberty International

One of the oldest and largest international DMC which operates at international level in over 40 destinations, has expressed interest in developing a bespoke experience within the project area.



Keep The Planet

An Italian based TO which has expressed interest in a long weekend trip across bear smart communities



Conclusions

The following report marks the end of Action E5 and the capacity enhancement program. At the start of the initiative, the project area lacked a network that could amplify the messages of bear smart communities, and no tour operators had established collaborations with local tourism providers.

After the programme, the area is equipped with a network with 37 members across the whole landscape, several tourism collaborations have been activated and an average of 60.000 euros are attracted every year to the bear fund, thanks to the contribution of local and foreign companies within the tourism industry.

The central Apennines has become an interesting example of nature-based tourism, where different stakeholders are all actively engaged in the conservation of this endangered species. As a result of the work carried out by RA, the World Animal Protection is going to candidate the project area as a Wildlife Heritage Area, considering the special efforts conducted within the field of enterprise development and engagement with local communities <https://www.wildlifeheritageareas.org/explore-areas/marsican-bear-heritage-area/>

New training for guides and tourism providers are being activated, such as the MOYO Training Foundation which is starting to invest in the project area <https://www.moyotraining.com/nature-positive> in order to expand the work kicked off with the capacity enhancement programme and motivate more tourism providers to adopt the same practices.

Finally, the work carried out within the network will be further presented during the International Bear Conference in 2026, which will be hosted by RA and project partners in Pescasseroli. A bear smart community field trip programme, including visits to local enterprises, will be included in the event to continue promoting the network.

Following RA's 2023 strategy, the network aims to reach a number of 30 trips annually and distribute economic benefits to more communities beyond the core area of the Marsican brown bear – which as of today continues to be the main target of existing and new wildlife tourism products.