

# Associazione Fondiaria Valli delle Sorgenti

A governance solution for improving the resilience of abandoned forests in Lombardy region.



Impacts of the fires that affected the forests of Luvinata municipality a few years ago.  
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Broadleaves and conifers present in the area  
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## /// Context ///

Forest management abandonment might expose natural areas, and people, to more severe risks associated with the increasing frequency of extreme events, e.g., large wildfires, droughts, floodings, windstorms, etc. (Rodríguez Fernández-Blanco et al. 2022). Land fragmentation, accompanied by gradual abandonment of rural and mountainous territory, impose the need to identify functional tools to encourage active and responsible forest management.

Among the proposed solutions, at Italian level, the Piedmont and Lombardy regions have recognized and promoted, through specific regional laws, an innovative type of association forms: the “Land Association” (in Italian Associazioni fondiari – ASFO). The main idea

behind land associations is the explicit purpose of bringing together the lands of individual members (public and private) under one common management, with the possibility for the land associations to be assigned by municipalities uncultivated or abandoned lands.

Among the land associations created in the last years thanks to regional laws, “ASFO Valli delle Sorgenti” is an excellent example. In fact, thanks to this association, public entities, such as the municipality of Luvinata (a small town near Varese, in Lombardy), and a regional park, and 40 other small private forest owners cooperate to manage 170 hectares of forest, which are highly susceptible to fires and flooding.

## /// Solution for a Resilient Future ///

The “Land association”(ASFO) represents an innovative type of association, promoted by the Lombardy and Piedmont regions, created specifically to curb the phenomenon of land fragmentation and land abandonment in rural areas (Beltramo et al., 2018). These associations should be based on a single management plan for all associated ownerships, in which the best technical and economic solutions for specific agricultural and forestry production objectives must be identified, guaranteeing the preservation of the environment and landscape. Within the association, property rights are not altered and individual lands can be managed (according to the plan, agreed upon) directly by the owners or they can be entrusted to individual members or third parties (through leases). According to regional laws, municipalities can also assign abandoned and silenced land to the land associations (Pettenella and Loreggian, 2023).

One of the land associations created as a result of the Lombardy regional law and which has more innovative features is the Land Association “Valli delle Sorgenti”, the origin of which starts from a fire that had affected dozens of hectares of forest not managed or abandoned. In fact, in 2017, a vast wildfire affected the forests of the mountain “Campo dei Fiori”, in the alpine area of Lombardy region, burning dozens of hectares and also threatening the small municipality of Luvinata. Favored by these fires, in subsequent years, floods with debris flows and windstorms still affected these forests, with strong social and environment impacts. After these calamitous events, rapid and effective management was strongly necessary for the restoration of damaged forest areas and prevention of other possible natural disasters. However, the areas affected by the fires and subsequent natural disasters (floods) were owned by many small private landowners and public landowners (a municipality

and a regional park), so it was very difficult to implement a common and effective management and planning. In 2021, thanks to the efforts of the mayor of the municipality of Luvinate, the Land Association “Valli delle Sorgenti” was created with the clear objective of shared management of the members’ forest, through a common multi-year management plan.

Since 2021, the Land association “Valli delle Sorgenti” has achieved really important results. To date, the



Forest management implemented thanks to the activities of the associations.  
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association has more than 40 members, both public (municipality of Luvinate and the regional park “Campo dei Fiori”) and small private owners for a shared management of 161 hectares (36% public and 63.5% private), representing 70% of the areas affected by natural disasters from 2017 onwards. Through the activities of the association, 10 different forestry operations have been activated, thanks mainly to public funds from regional funds and European projects, such as the LIFE Climate Positive Project.



Involvement of local communities in the activities  
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## /// Always Moving Forward ///

To date, the main incomes of the Land Association “Valli delle Sorgenti” derive from public funds provided for the planning and for some specific forestry operations. The next challenge for the association is to diversify revenues by also attracting private funds for maintaining and enhancing ecosystem services provided by the forest area. For this reason, in 2023 the association began the process to achieve forest management certification according to the FSC standard. In addition to forest management certification, the association is verifying and monitoring the impacts of forest management on ecosystem services, according to FSC Ecosystem

Services Procedure (FSC-PRO-30-006). In fact, this procedure aims to establish requirements for FSC-certified forest managers to credibly demonstrate the impact of their activities on ecosystem services, as well as provides tools for forest managers to access ecosystem services markets and/or other benefits. Once the area and ecosystem services have been certified, the land association should improve its marketing skills to attract investors, as well as analyze fiscal issues within members to properly manage private and public revenues.

### Further information

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