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METSO — The Forest Biodiversity Programme for Southern Finland



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The Forest Biodiversity Programme METSO 2008–2016 aims to halt the ongoing decline in the biodiversity of forest habitats and species, and establish stable favourable trends especially in Southern Finland's forest ecosystems. The METSO programme is targeted to both privately and state-owned lands.

The programme aims to:

- activate voluntary-based conservation agreements between forest owners and authorities
- improve Finland's network of protected forests
- continue and enhance the application of nature management methods in commercially managed forests
- improve the knowledge base on forest biodiversity conservation and train professional foresters
- increase collaboration between forest and environmental organizations
- improve communication on biodiversity of forest habitats and ecosystem services

A new way of conservation thinking

METSO brings a new way of thinking to Finnish nature conservation. It is an example of a payment scheme for ecosystem services where protected areas are designated based on voluntary conservation agreements between the authorities and forest owners.

This voluntary-based approach has been warmly welcomed by forest owners, NGOs, forest companies and authorities. An increasing number of forest owners are interested in preserving ecologically valuable forest habitats by offering their forests either for temporary conservation or for permanent protection. Forest owners value the voluntary approach, the independence in decision-making and the chance to retain their property rights in the available conservation schemes. And the results up to now show that the forest sites that have been pro-

ected through voluntary measures generally have high ecological values.

The Finnish government aims that by 2016, sites covering about 96 000 hectares will be voluntarily offered by landowners to be established as private nature reserves or acquired by the State. In addition, at least 82 000 hectares of different sites with natural values will be preserved in commercially managed privately owned forests. The conservation agreements signed to protect these sites can be permanent or set for a specific time period of 10 years, according to a forest owner's preference. Active nature management of the site can be included in both fixed-term conservation agreements or in permanent ones. Funding for the METSO programme is about 40 million euros per year.

Ecological shopping list

The site selection criteria define what kind of ecologically valuable habitats are to be protected in the programme, in other words they form "an ecological shopping list". The criteria are based on the ecological structure of forests and on forest habitat types important for biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Sites are especially favoured where habitats are well preserved in their natural state or could easily be restored, where they host rare or endangered species, or where they are

important for ecological connectivity. On a smaller scale, measures are particularly taken to conserve forests that are rich in biodiversity because they contain features such as decaying wood, burnt or charred wood, mature broad-leaved trees, large aspen trees, nutrient-rich soils, springs, brooks, and other natural water features. Consideration may also be given to impacts on economic activities, recreation, tourism and cultural values, if they also support biodiversity conservation.

Public lands

Along with privately owned lands, METSO contributes to the conservation, restoration and management of publicly owned lands, such as forests managed by Metsähallitus, the state-run enterprise that oversees the state-owned forests. Up through 2010, Metsähallitus has contributed to the METSO programme by restoring over 30 000 hectares of state-owned forests and mires inside conservation areas. In addition, Metsähallitus is responsible for managing traditional rural biotopes and broad-leaved forests both at privately and state-owned

conservation areas. Furthermore, Metsähallitus has protected some hundred new sites in state-owned commercial forests, of which about 10 000 hectares fulfil the selection criteria of the programme.

METSO also supports forest conservation in municipalities. An increasing number of municipalities have started mapping the natural values in their forests according to the METSO programme selection criteria. The programme offers financial support to protect these sites.

Research

Research plays an important role in assessing the METSO programme's long-term ecological, economic and social impacts. Under the programme, 2 million euros per year are allocated to support both basic and applied research on forest biodiversity.

Further information:

METSO programme's website
www.metsopolku.fi/en

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