

SUCCESS AND CHALLENGES OF VOLUNTARY FOREST CONSERVATION IN FINLAND

INTRODUCTION

In southern Finland most forests are privately owned and commercially used, thus the protected area network has remained scattered and disconnected.

The Forest Biodiversity Program METSO (2008–2025) is the most important investment to voluntary conservation in Finland. METSO is coordinated by the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and it is implemented by regional environmental and forest authorities.

The main goals of METSO are:

- to improve protected area network
- to increase biodiversity in commercial forests
- to increase collaboration between forestry and environment sectors, landowners and other stakeholders, and
- to enhance biodiversity knowledge, communication and education

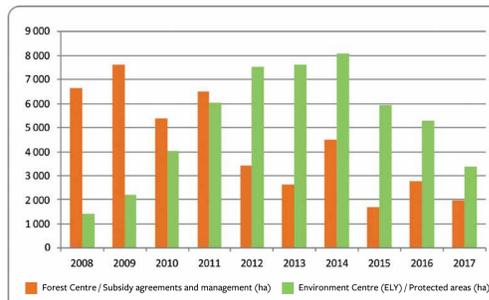


VOLUNTARY CONSERVATION

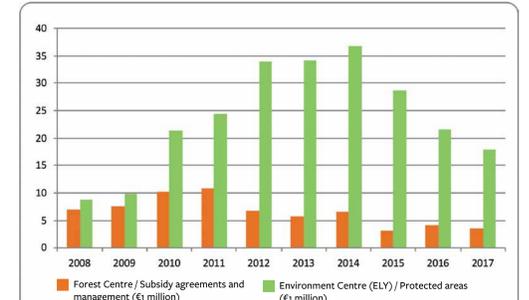
In METSO Program land owners can voluntarily offer their forests to permanent or fixed-term conservation and to receive full monetary compensation for that. The focus is on private land but also municipal and state-owned lands are involved. The site selection criteria define which habitats are accepted for conservation. These include mainly boreal forests with natural characteristics, but also other wooded target habitats with biodiversity values.

The objectives for METSO are to have 96 000 hectares established as protected areas and to safeguard biodiversity on 82 000 hectares of forest habitats in commercially managed forests with environmental forestry subsidy agreements and nature management projects.

The present proportion of protected forest land is 3,6 % in Southern Finland. After reaching objectives of METSO in 2025 the proportion will be around 4 - 4,4 %. So far 67 % of the objective to establish new protected areas and 52 % of actions on commercial forests has been accomplished.



Annual area (ha) of protected areas (Environment Centre ELY) and environmental forestry subsidy agreements and implementation of nature management projects (Forest Centre).



Annual funding (€ million) of protected areas (Environment Centre ELY) and environmental forestry subsidy agreements and implementation of nature management projects (Forest Centre).

SCIENCE MEET PRACTICE

During the ten METSO-years over 100 research and development projects have studied the ecological and socio-economic impacts of the program and supported its implementation (e.g. Paloniemi et al. 2017).

Scientific research

- Improve the knowledge base on forest biodiversity and its conservation (e.g. Juslén & Sirkkiä 2013, Kuusela et al. 2017)

Nature management and restoration projects

- Develop new practical methods for management and restoration in commercial forests to improve the status of forest biodiversity, e.g. controlled burnings and management of herb rich forests
- Target habitats have been e.g. wooded peatlands, herb-rich forests, springs, brooks, game habitats, eskers and habitats for threatened forest species

Regional partnerships

- Develop economically and socially sustainable operation models to integrate forest biodiversity conservation with other forest uses (e.g. Borg & Paloniemi 2012)
- Encourage active collaboration between all stakeholders – land owners, forest, environmental and game authorities, NGOs, nature-based tourism business

SUCCESS AND CHALLENGES

Major success stories of METSO:

- Strong support to the voluntary program from land owners, NGOs, forest companies, authorities, politicians and general public
- Protected METSO sites generally have high ecological values (Siitonen et al. 2012)
- Increased collaboration between forestry and environmental authorities and other parties
- Increased knowledge on biodiversity among forest and environmental professionals and forest owners

Major challenges for METSO in the future:

- Maintaining the financing and human resources of the program over reign of several governments
- Mainstreaming results of the research and development projects
- Re-evaluating the goals to implement current international biodiversity targets
- Small size of the protected areas and poor connectivity of the protected area network



References

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Read more:

- <http://www.metsopolku.fi/en-US>