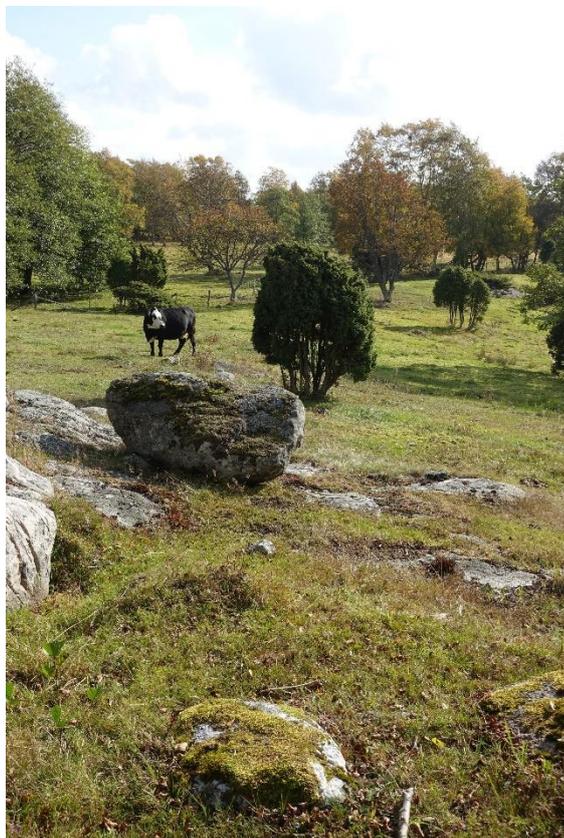


Almost all seminatural grasslands and grazed woodlands are critically endangered

Seminatural grasslands and grazed woodlands have been deemed even more endangered as more information about their status has been obtained. On the other hand, the size of managed land areas has increased from the previous assessment.



Over the course of centuries, a distinctive and rich set of species has developed on seminatural grasslands and grazed woodlands. The total area of these habitats in Finland has been decreasing since the 1880s, but there was a further increase in the drop of their amount and quality after the wars. There has been a drop of more than 90% from the 1960s to the current day. The quality of seminatural grasslands has also significantly decreased.

Most threatened habitat types in Finland

All of the seminatural grasslands and grazed woodlands are threatened. They were divided into twelve groups (such as dry meadows, alluvial meadows and wooded pastures) and forty habitat types (such as grass rich dry meadows, herb rich alluvial meadows and wooded pastures dominated by coniferous trees) in the assessment. Of the forty habitat types, as many as 38 were deemed Critically Endangered (CR) in the entire country. The only seminatural habitat types that are slightly less threatened are graminoid heaths and dwarf shrub heaths, but they were also categorized Endangered (EN).

There are less than a hundred hectares each of the smallest threatened seminatural grassland habitat types in Finland. These include herb rich heaths, calcareous rock meadows, dwarf shrub rich dry meadows, calcareous moist meadows, *Eleocharis acicularis* freshwater meadows, seashore salt patches and pollard meadows. Pollard meadows and fen meadows can only be retained by means of management actions in conservation areas. Seashore meadows on the land uplift coast, which have been named as a habitat type of international responsibility, is the only habitat type among those assessed where the managed surface area has significantly increased from the last assessment.

Agricultural change is the key

The underlying reason behind seminatural habitat types being threatened is a change in the agricultural production methods of farms. Gradual overgrowing after cessation of grazing and mowing, the clearing of land for cultivation, afforestation and also water construction, dredging, and eutrophication in shore areas, are the most significant reasons behind the declines.

The key threat in the future will be increasing overgrowth, but eutrophication and construction (especially in the case of small biotopes) will also have a negative impact on the state of seminatural grasslands and grazed woodlands.

Agricultural environmental subsidies are effective – minor increases in surface area expected

The retention of seminatural grasslands requires proper and continuous management. The environmental subsidy system – increased subsidies for valuable sites, in particular – has proven an excellent incentive for management. Non-production related investment subsidies have also

assisted in the bringing back into the scope of management sites that have not been managed for a long time. At present, some 30,000 hectares of meadows, wooded pastures and grazed woodlands are being managed with environmental subsidies. The total surface area of managed seashore meadows has increased the most.

To stop further decline and deterioration of seminatural grasslands and the species in them, the size of the managed area must be clearly increased. In addition, the management must be targeted to the most valuable sites. More parties to manage the traditional biotopes could be obtained by expanding the agricultural subsidy system. Even a minor incentive may be significant for the starting of management actions.

Furthermore, comprehensive cooperation between administrative sectors and organisations as part of official duties, as voluntary work and in the form of a variety of rural development, nature management and employment projects is needed. Landscape management entrepreneurship should be further developed. By securing the retention of the seminatural grasslands, we will ensure that a significant part of the biodiversity of the Finnish nature, our cultural history and identity, and our beautiful rural landscapes will be retained.

For further information, please contact

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