



METSO Fact sheet / May 2015

## METSO — The Forest Biodiversity Programme for Southern Finland



JOUNI KUNGA

The Forest Biodiversity Programme METSO 2008–2025 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 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 organisations
- 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. Active nature management of the sites can be included in both fixed-term conservation agreements or in permanent ones.

Forest owners value the voluntary approach, the inde-

pendence 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 protected through voluntary measures generally have high ecological values.

Forest owners get full financial compensation equivalent to the value of timber at the protected site. With permanent protection, the private forest owner's income from the site is tax free. Additionally, protected sites can be used for nature-based tourism and recreation. For forest companies, METSO offers tools for sustainable forestry and provides a green image that is also attractive to customers abroad. Funding for the METSO programme varies between 30–40 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 habitats 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 im-

portant 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.

## Targets and results

The Finnish government's objective by 2025 is to have sites covering about 96 000 hectares that will be voluntarily offered by landowners to be established as private nature reserves or that will be acquired by the State. In addition, about 82 000 hectares of valuable forest habitats will be protected in commercially managed privately owned forests.

With these targets, the METSO programme also forms a part of Finland's implementation of various international agreements and commitments, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the EU 2020 Biodiversity Strategy.

At the end of 2014, about 52% of the first target had been achieved. This includes 37 000 hectares offered by landowners and 13 000 hectares protected by the State. Concerning commercially managed forests, at the end of 2014 some 45% of the target had been reached. This includes 33 000 hectares of fixed-term conservation agreements and 4 000 hectares of active nature management. Most of the protected sites are heathland forests rich in decaying wood and wooded mires, which are the most common habitats in Finland.

### Further information:

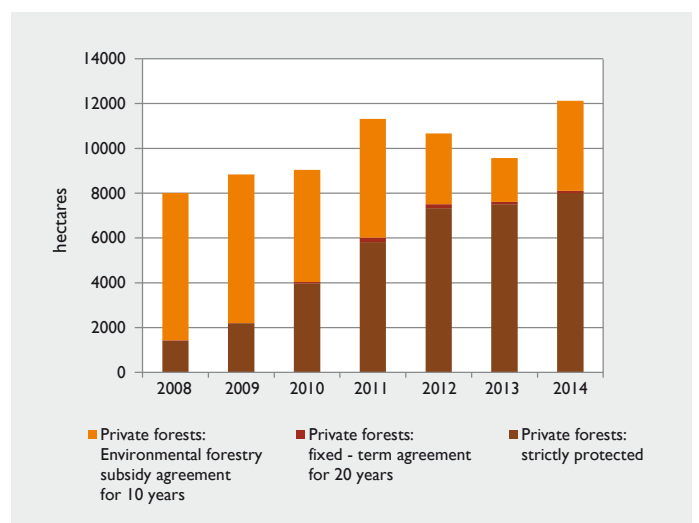
**METSO programme's website**  
[www.metsonpolku.fi/en](http://www.metsonpolku.fi/en)

**Ministry of the Environment**  
P.O. Box 35, FI-00023 Government, Finland  
[www.ym.fi/en](http://www.ym.fi/en)

**Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry**  
P.O. Box 30, FI-00023 Government, Finland  
[www.mmm.fi/en](http://www.mmm.fi/en)



MARKKU MERILUOTO



MIKKO KUUSINEN