



METSO Leaflet

FOREST BIODIVERSITY PROGRAMME FOR SOUTHERN FINLAND METSO 2003-2007

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NETWORK PROJECT APPLICATIONS ACCEPTED

The application process for the joint network projects on forest biodiversity has started. This has been notified to forest owners and the general public through the main newspapers, and information has been distributed to forest sector organisations and representatives of NGOs. Network projects are voluntary, based on the forest owners' interest in preserving valuable sites. The first stage of the application process – search for ideas – lasts until the end of July.

CRITERIA HELP TO IDENTIFY VALUABLE SITES

The criteria for selecting the sites of pilot projects under the METSO programme were completed at the end of May. The criteria are based on nature conservation biology. The primary and supplementary criteria established by an expert group of the Ministry of the Environment will be used to identify the value of the sites and assess their representativeness.

The most important habitats to be included in the pilot projects are herb-rich forests, heathland forests with decaying wood, birch-spruce mires, sunny slopes of eskers and ice-marginal formations, flood plain forests and flood meadows in forests, wooded traditional biotopes and forests in coastal areas where the land is rising. Specific criteria have been defined for each habitat type.

According to the primary criteria, for example, the sites in birch-spruce mires should be in their natural state in terms of their water status or easy to restore as such. Location close to present conservation areas, surface area or e.g. occurrence of threatened or demanding species may be used as supplementary criteria.

The division into primary and supplementary criteria is not clear-cut, but primary criteria receive more stress in selecting the sites. The general principle in their application is that the more criteria a specific site meets, the more valuable it is for biodiversity. The criteria are indicative tools, and regional and local factors are always taken into account in their application. The criteria will be complemented and developed on the basis of experiences gained during the summer and statements from various parties. Information material will be prepared to illustrate the criteria.

The report of the criteria work group will be published in the beginning of July in the Finnish Environment series of environmental administration. For further information, please contact Project Manager Mikko Kuusinen at the Ministry of the Environment, tel. +358-9-160 39350.

SEARCH FOR INNOVATIVE NETWORK PROJECTS

The planning of network projects starts at the local level when the different actors have noted that there is sufficient interest in cooperation in the potential area to be covered. The application process concerning the ideas ends on 31 July 2003.

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After the proposal has been approved by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and Ministry of the Environment, its development may continue during the second stage of the application process in the autumn.

A network project may be constructed around a significant key area for biodiversity – e.g. a national park or hiking area, or municipal or church recreation area. Commercial forests located close to such conservation areas could be incorporated into joint network projects.

Part of the State funds allocated to network projects can be used for the steering and coordination of the preparation and implementation of the project, but the majority of the funds for each network project should be spent on practical measures to enhance biodiversity. The measures will be implemented under the Act on the Financing of Sustainable Forestry and Nature Conservation Act. All measures implemented under the Financing Act are temporary. It should also be noted that, according to the Forest Act, the characteristics of particularly important habitats must be preserved through careful treatment of the area concerned in the future as well. After the amendment of the Financing Act it should be possible to undertake measures which are similar to trading in sites with special natural value in the network projects. According to the Nature Conservation Act, a land owner could also preserve an area either permanently or for a certain time should he or she wish to do so.

Planning of the network projects and implementation of pilot projects provides information on preserving biological diversity through learning and interaction. Collaboration between the different actors, such as land owners and parties representing them, NGOs and administrative organisations, gives further information and supports the learning process.

RESTORATION AND MANAGEMENT OFF TO A GOOD START AT METSÄHALLITUS

Restoration and management of habitats in nature conservation areas are important elements in developing their biodiversity. The objective is to restore habitats which have been altered by human actions to as close to the natural state as possible. In forests restoration may concern the species, structures or actions. Most of the restoration measures are of one-off nature, but they should induce long-term natural developments, such as stand and decayed wood successions or paludification. It is estimated that under the METSO programme the State has in its possession about 700 nature conservation areas or sites where restoration measures are needed. During the programme implementation the Metsähallitus will restore about 33,000 ha of mineral soil and peatlands in these areas.

Restoration and nature management work got a good start in mid-winter. In February the work was under way in 18 sites, including some islands in the sea area. Work was started in sites for which there already was a restoration and management plan. Drawing up new plans was started immediately after the decisions on METSO were made and their implementation has also been started. At the end of April the restoration and management work had been completed in six sites and in 20 sites the work was under way. In most of the latter the next stage will be blocking the ditches in mires in the summer. The spring and summer bring along new instruments, e.g. restoration burning is started immediately when the weather permits this. For further information on restoration and management, please contact Project Manager Hannu Lehtonen (hannu-lehtonen@metsa.fi), tel. 0205 64 6629 or visit the Internet pages of the ministries at www.mmm.fi/metso and www.ymparisto.fi/metso.

