

**A NEW WAY OF CONSERVATION THINKING — FOREST BIODIVERSITY PROGRAMME METSO IN FINLAND**

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**Introduction**

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 in Southern Finland’s forest ecosystems (Finnish Government 2008). The METSO programme is targeted at both private- and state-owned lands. METSO is directed at bringing about a radical shift away from the top-down governing approach of nature conservation to voluntary conservation agreements between the authorities and forest owners. See METSO pilot <http://www.metsonpolku.fi/metso/www/en/index.php>

This poster describes how the METSO programme has achieved its aims in terms of

- (8) improving Finland’s network of protected areas
- (9) increasing collaboration between forest and environmental organizations
- (10) providing advice to forest owners

**Methods**

In February 2010, we conducted a web survey of those implementing the METSO programme, especially on the local or regional level. The questionnaire was sent to 140 people participating in METSO, and 68 answered it. The respondents were 45 years old on average, and 31% of them were women. In the survey, we explored how the METSO participants perceived the implementation practices of METSO and what kind of impacts they felt the programme had.

**Results and discussion**

The site selection criteria define the type of ecologically valuable habitats to be protected under 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. 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, and where they are close to protected areas. On a smaller scale, the programme focuses on measures to conserve forests that are rich in biodiversity because they contain features such as decaying wood, burnt or charred wood, and large aspen trees.

Additionally, METSO contributes to the management and restoration of state-owned lands. Metsähallitus (a state-run enterprise that manages the state-owned forests) has restored about 28 300 hectares of state-owned lands. Metsähallitus has also protected 104 new sites on state-owned lands that cover 13 500 hectares, of which about 10 000 hectares are forests that fulfil the selection criteria defined for the programme (Lehtomäki et al. 2009).

Conservation under the METSO programme is based on forest owners’ voluntary initiatives. Since METSO began, the nature conservation and forestry authorities are cooperating more intensively than before. They compare forest owners’ tenders, choose suitable sites and negotiate conservation agreements. Forest owners have appreciated this voluntary approach launched by METSO (Paloniemi & Varho 2009).

**References**

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