

Developing Measures of Sustainability for Nature Tourism in Protected Areas

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Nature protection areas are often significant and attractive recreation areas and tourist destinations. Although the main purpose of protected areas is nature conservation, legislation mostly allows for a certain amount of recreation and research as well. In order to further develop possibilities for quality nature tourism in conservation areas, Metsähallitus is in a process of developing measures of sustainable nature tourism for protected areas, wilderness areas, and areas that are in nature protection programmes yet to be implemented.

The development process is part of a larger project with which Metsähallitus is promoting sustainable nature tourism in protected areas. Other parts of the project include developing principles of sustainable nature tourism, agreements with nature tourism entrepreneurs, and creating a process for enhancing sustainability in the protected areas.

Based on former experiences, literature and field testing, Metsähallitus has developed several measures to estimate the environmental impacts of nature tourism in protected areas. They are derived from the nine principles of Metsähallitus for sustainable nature tourism, including aspects of ecological, socio-cultural, and economic sustainability. The measures have been tested in six pilot areas: five National Parks representing both southern and northern Finland (Nuuksio, Repovesi, Oulanka, Pallas-Ounas and Pyhä-Luosto), and Kaldoaivi Wilderness Area.

This article describes the measures that were found most useful based on field testing as well as when judged by general criteria for good indicators. Furthermore, it describes the ways in which the measures are used. They are incorporated into the overall planning process of Metsähallitus as a tool for monitoring the impacts of nature tourism in protected areas. In the planning process, sustainability is approached by defining the limits of acceptable change for each measure. While some of the measures are ready to be used, further development and testing is still required.

Keywords: Nature tourism, outdoor recreation, protected areas, measures, limits of acceptable change