

NATURAL RESOURCE PLANNING IN METSÄHALLITUS

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Abstract

Metsähallitus is a Finnish state enterprise which manages almost one third of Finland's land area and state waters. Business units include forestry, nature tourism and other activities based on the natural resources. Public administration services include nature conservation areas and free recreational services to public. Forestry is the main business unit, with revenue of 100 mill. euros yearly to state budget. Besides the yearly revenue, the parliament yearly defines the value of common social duties which lower the profit compared to other forestry operators. These are special emphasis on biodiversity, recreation, reindeer husbandry, Sámi culture and employment. Natural resource planning is Metsähallitus' own planning process within this framework. NRP combines the various targets of the state, customer expectations and the stakeholders' views to a best possible combination.

The overall aim is to achieve a balance between the various objectives and to align them with the opportunities offered by the natural resources of the region and with the other objectives set for Metsähallitus' activities. The use of land and waters is examined in relation to the different aspects of sustainability (ecological, social and economic). To provide a basis for these decisions, the planning process involves gathering and generating information on natural resources, the opportunities that they offer and the expectations placed on them. Stakeholders (e.g. tourism and recreation) and citizens have an opportunity to participate in the planning process. Co-operation groups representing local stakeholders play a key role in participation.

In natural resource planning the impacts of various activities are compared according to the results of different alternatives. For examples, by changing land use and/or defining logging restrictions e.g. in the vicinity of the touristic sights and routes and simulating the development of forest resources, it is possible to produce comparable indexes that can be used to illustrate the impacts of the activities.

As a result of the planning process, the emphasis of Metsähallitus' different activities in relation to one another and the extent of these activities are updated for planning for next ten years. Implementation of the natural resources plan is monitored over five year period by various indicators.

The pressure and possibilities of forest recreation and tourism varies a lot in different part of Finland. In accordance with Eastern and Western Lapland's natural resource plans, Metsähallitus's activities focus on the needs of recreational use and tourism. The switch in focus was realised by defining the areas important for tourism. The important areas mainly consist of the existing protected areas and other specially designated forests, plus areas near tourist centres as well as snowmobile, skiing and dogsledding routes. Within the area of managed forests, the network of areas focusing on recreational use was expanded by approximately 31,000 hectares.

In terms of forest management, special attention is being paid to factors that affect the landscape in areas that are significant for tourism. Forestry practices that help maintain forest cover, such as selective loggings and small openings, are used in tourist areas. Small-scale delineating of the regeneration loggings and retention tree plots are needed to protect the scenery values.

Key words

natural resources, forestry planning, participation, forest recreation