

SUURI METSÄDIALOGIPÄIVÄ

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Forest info package

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Defining forests

Natural forests are also known as evergreen forests, primeval forests or old-growth forests.

They cover about **2-3%** of forests in Finland. *(Yle)*

Near natural state forest are forests in almost natural state, but for example with some trees cut decades ago. These type of forest include areas, which have retained more than usually high amount of decaying wood and biodiversity. Less than **10%** of forests are of this type.

In **commercial forests**, wood is grown for human use and forestry. The focus is on producing a valuable wood harvest . Most forests in Finland are commercial forests, **around 90%**. *(Natural Resources Institute Finland (Luke))*



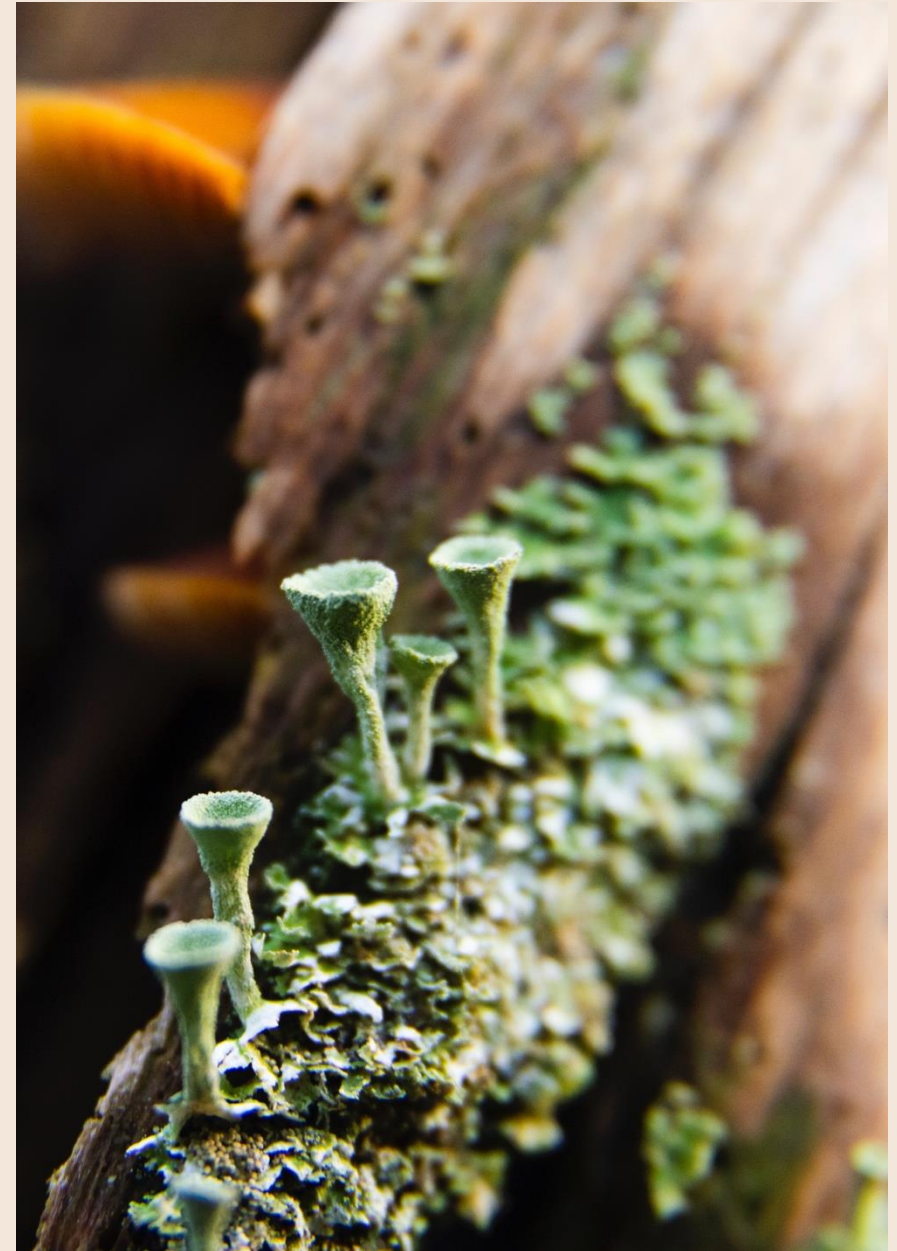
Forest species and types

More than than 20,000 species are living in the forests in Finland: mammals, birds, fungi, insects and plants. This is almost half of all species found in all Finland.

(Ymparisto.fi)

Forests vary greatly from each other. They are typically devided into forest types such as herb-rich forests or deciduous forests, different heath forests, and peatland forests. *(National Land Survey of Finland 2019, Tapa term bank)*

The most common trees in are pine and spruce. Other common species are birch, European ash, aspen, grey alder, larch and juniper. In southern Finland, noble deciduous trees are also found.



Some history of forests in Finland

Forests, waters and bogs **formed the original natural landscape of Finland**, which was very different from today's economic landscape.

Forests have been **an essential part of livelihoods and have been utilized** for berry and mushroom picking, hunting, livestock farming, reindeer herding, healing, and medicine. As agriculture, transportation, and settlements expanded, forests were cleared for fields and housing. **Trees have been used** for firewood, tar production, shipbuilding, lumber, and to meet the needs of the mining industry and ironworks.

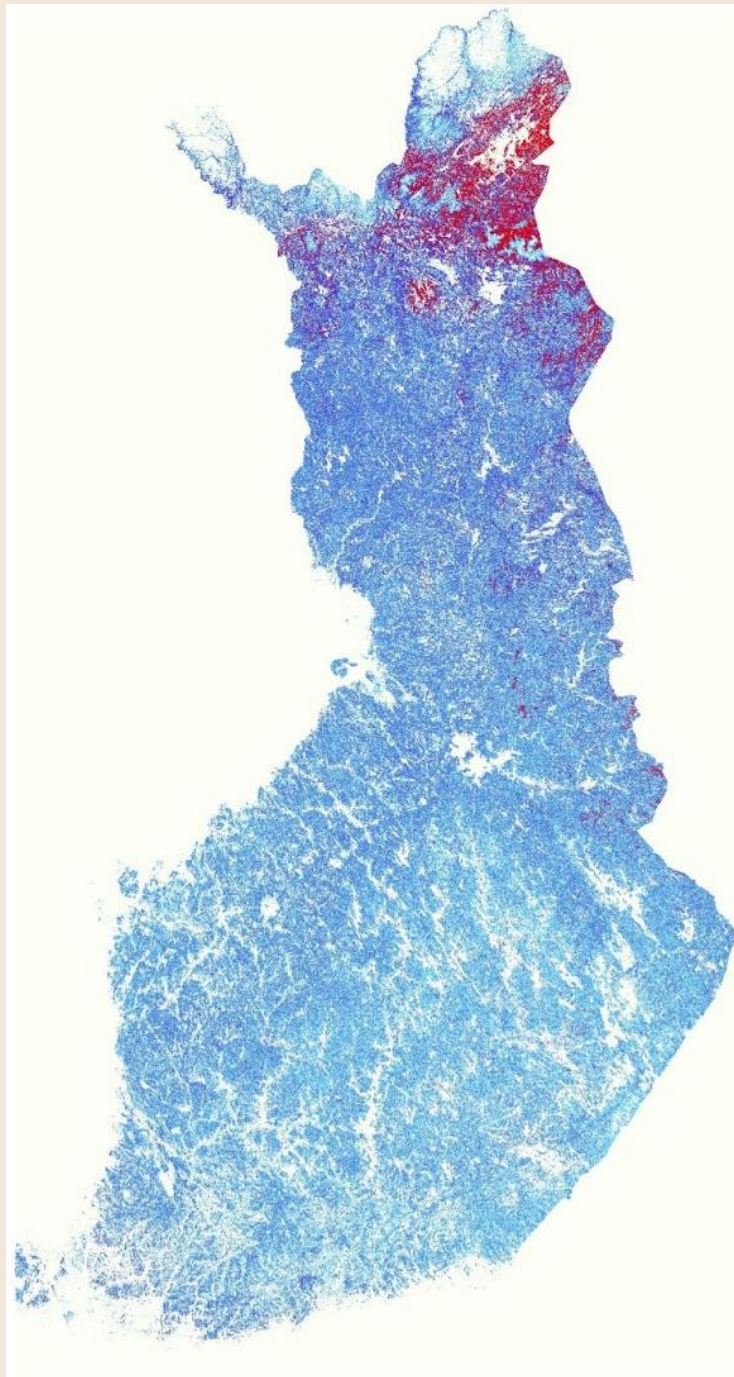
Forests have also been a significant **source of inspiration in art, culture**, and the construction of Finnish national identity. They have **been regarded as sacred places**, believed to be inhabited by spirits, gnomes, and other supernatural beings.

With industrialization in the 1800s, the demand for wood grew rapidly, leading to the **emergence of the forest industry**. At the same time, **interest in forestry increased**, and education in the field was established, today found at the university level. (*Mmm.fi*)

In the early 1900s, the forest industry was a central pillar of Finland's national economy, helping to **pay a significant portion of the war reparations** to the Soviet Union after World War II. (*Ylen Elävä Arkisto, Yle's Living archive*)

The age of forests in Finland today

(Luonnonvarakeskus 2019)



What are forests used for today?

- **Raw materials for the forest industry**, such as pulp, paper and cardboard products, and timber.
- **Bioenergy production in power plants**, such as wood fuel and waste liquids.
- **Other commercial purposes and livelihoods**, such as reindeer herding and tourism.
- **Everyone's rights**, such as berry and mushroom picking, hunting and hiking.
- **Leisure and well-being activities**, sports, mental health, cultural traditions, and spiritual purposes.

Who owns forests in Finland?

- Private individuals **almost 60%** (over 600 000 forest owners)
- Finnish state **over 30%**
- Forest companies **around 7%**
- Others (cities, churches, cities, municipalities) **about 5%**

(Forest center 2023, Mmm.fi)

Forests in the middle conflicts

- **The use of forests faces conflicting expectations.**
Their biodiversity and carbon storage should be protected, but at the same time, forests are important for the economy and employment. **The rights of the Sámi people have also often been at odds with Finnish industrial and economic interests**, and the state, forest industry, and mining industry have at times expanded their plans in the Sámpi without the full consent of the Sámi population or sufficient consideration of their rights.
- **The forestry debate is polarized.**
Some emphasize protection and recreational use, while others focus on forestry and jobs. The core of the debate is the role of forests in climate and environmental policy.
- **The solutions vary.**
Some believe that the market economy will lead to more sustainable development, others want to expand protected areas. Some think that sufficient protection of the environment requires a change of the entire economic system.

Forests and Finnish economy



- The forest industry has played a key role in laying the foundation of the Finnish welfare state. Due to the historical connection between Finland's national economy and the forest industry, **the sector holds considerable power and respect in the country.**
- Even today, the forest industry remains a crucial part of Finland's economy. It accounts for about one-sixth of Finland's goods exports and directly employed approximately 36,000 people in 2022. *(Luke)*
- On the other hand, automation also in the forest industry has reduced jobs and transformed the sector. Currently, most of the wood harvested in Finland ends up as low-value disposable products (such as tissue paper or cardboard) or is directly burned for energy. *(Mmm.fi, Luke, HS.fi)*

Forest and the environment

Although the number and volume of living trees have increased in Finland, **forest biodiversity is declining**, particularly due to the reduction of old-growth forests and deadwood. *(Luke, Finnish Environment Institute Syke)*.

Biodiversity loss, or nature loss caused by human activity, is driven by factors such as changes in land and sea use, global warming, overconsumption of natural resources, construction, pollution, and invasive species.

Biodiversity loss is closely linked to **climate change**, and they should be addressed simultaneously. A warming climate increases forest fires and insect outbreaks, further reducing biodiversity.

In 2022, it was revealed that Finland's soil and forests no longer function as **carbon sinks** but instead release more carbon into the atmosphere than they absorb. *(Luke, HS)*

- Carbon sinks should be strengthened to ensure that Finland achieves carbon neutrality by 2035.



Endangered species

In Finland, about **12%** of species are endangered, and of these, **31%** live in forests. Various restoration efforts have partly succeeded in reversing the trend of endangerment.

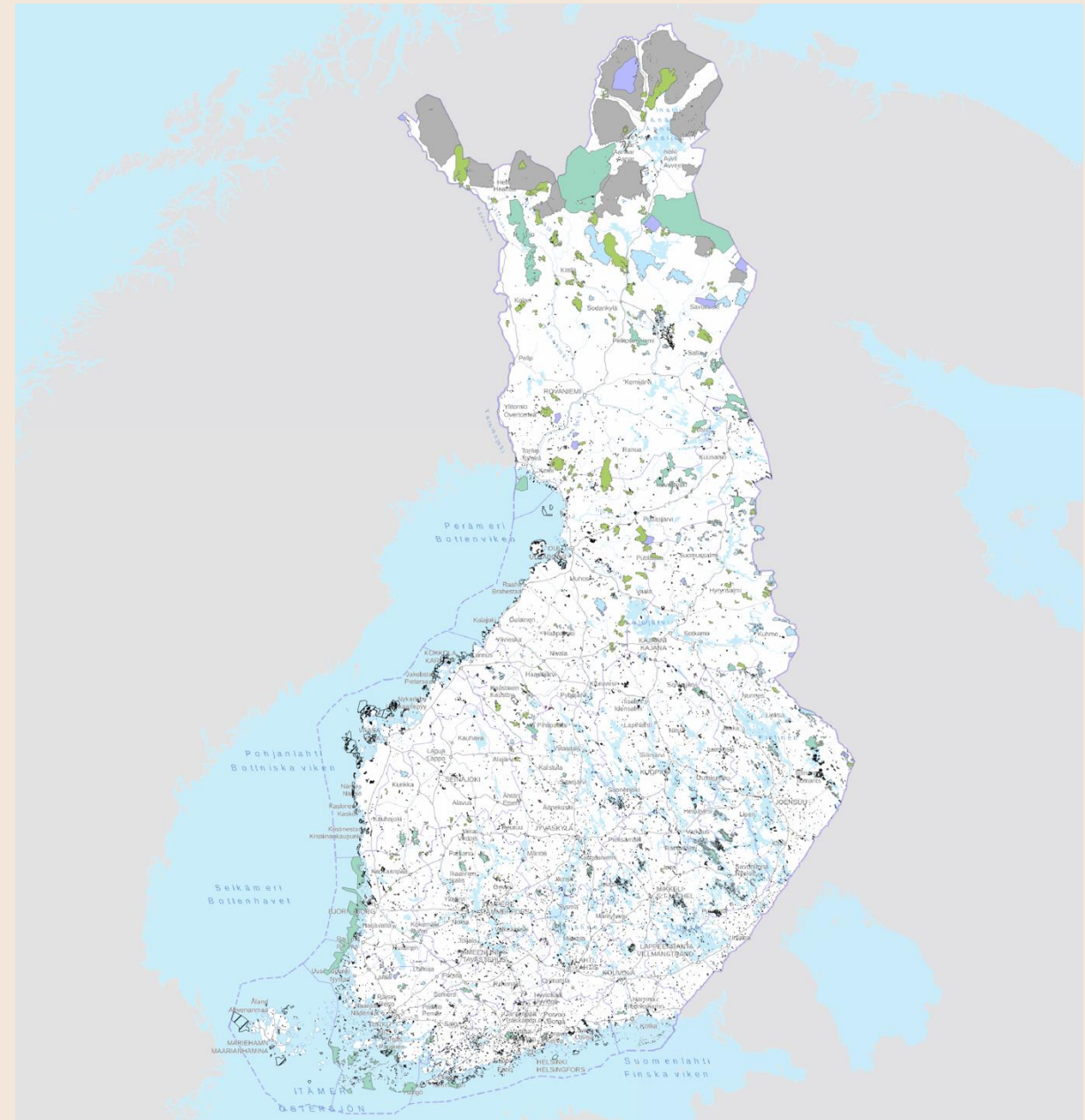
- Examples of extremely or highly endangered forest species include the coal tit, pill moss, coral spot fungus.
- Endangered species are particularly found in old forests because many organisms and habitats require a diverse environment and time to develop. **Deadwood, meaning decaying trees, are especially important habitats** for a large number of forest species.
- Plantations with only one or two tree species as well as large clear-cutting (also known as final cutting or regeneration felling), reduce biodiversity by deteriorating the living conditions of many forest species.

(Red list of Finnish Species 2019)



Protected areas

- **Protected forests make up approximately 13% of the total forest area in Finland.**
(Luke 2022)
- This number includes temporarily protected areas, conservation areas where logging is permitted, and non-productive forests, such as nearly treeless wastelands and barren lands.
- **Strictly and permanently protected, tree-covered forests account for only about 6% of all forests.**
(WWF, Greenpeace)



Picture: Syke

Protecting biodiversity and sustainable forest management

Small, isolated areas are not enough to safeguard forest biodiversity; instead, protected areas should form a **network of conservation areas** (Syke). This is why efforts are being made to protect biodiversity partly within commercial forests as well. In southern Finland, in particular, forests have become **fragmented into small patches**. (Yle, Ministry of the Environment)

In addition to protecting old-growth forests and establishing conservation networks, it is crucial to promote a more diverse tree species composition in commercial forests, advance ecological compensations, restore nature, consider environmental and climate impacts in all political decision-making, and move towards sustainable use of natural resources and a circular economy.

Biodiversity is also linked to **securing the self-determination and land-use rights of Indigenous peoples, such as the Sámi**. Sámi livelihoods depend on a clean environment, and protecting their rights promotes both human rights and the preservation of nature. (Ministry of the Environment, Amnesty)

