

# Criteria for primary and old-growth forests in Finland

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# Background

- EU Biodiversity Strategy states that all remaining (1) primary forests and (2) old-growth forests must be strictly protected in EU Member States
- Government programme: “The Government will protect the remaining state-owned old-growth forests that are in their natural state and meet the national criteria. The Government will ensure that independent criteria are drawn up within a short time frame.”
- Starting point: EU Commissions Guidelines for Defining, Mapping, Monitoring and Strictly Protecting EU Primary and Old-Growth Forests (2023)





# Process

- In accordance with the EU Commission's guidelines, researchers from the Finnish Environment Institute and the Natural Resources Institute Finland prepared a review frame for the national definition of old-growth forests in 2023 (publication Finnish Environment Institute 2/2024)
- Three main indicators in particular, which have been identified in the EU Commission's guidelines, were used in defining old-growth forests. These indicators are: *natural tree species, large amounts and proportions of deadwood, and old and large trees*
- The definition of primary forests was not examined more in detail in the report. Primary forests are subject to the FAO's definition, which also includes young primary developmental stages.







# Process

- Based on the researcher's report the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry presented two different alternative definitions of old-growth forests to the Government
- Government discussed these alternatives and made a political compromise in spring 2024 of the definitions to be used in Finland
- Public hearing was arranged in summer 2024
  - Plenty of feedback was received both from stakeholders and private citizens
- Government decision in principle is under preparation and will be adopted by the Government early 2025
- The criteria will not be legally binding





# Criteria

- **Main criteria:**
  1. Age of the stand
  2. Amount of dead wood
- In addition, at least two **complementary criteria** need to be met:
  1. Stand origin
  2. Structural complexity
  3. Habitat trees
  4. Indicator species
- Different threshold values for the (1) hemisouthern, (2) middle and (3) northern boreal zones as well as (4) for northern Lapland



# What next

- Protection of old-growth forests on private land will be implemented through the voluntary measures of the METSO Programme
- Metsähallitus Forestry Ltd takes an inventory of the sites located on state-owned lands between 2024 and 2026
- The Government will make decisions on new strictly protected areas in 2026
- In addition, the Government has already agreed to strictly protect up to 90 000 ha state forests, which most probably will include most of the stands meeting the criteria







# Conclusions

- The definition of the national criteria for old-growth forests has been a politically steered process
- The threshold values for stand age and amount of dead wood have been set relatively high
- Most forest stands meeting the criteria are already inside protected areas or set-asides, such as part of the landscape-ecological network on state land
- The highest amount of non-protected areas is in the northernmost parts of Finland
- The old-growth forest criteria are not the only mechanisms to improve the current state of forest biodiversity in Finland, we have also:
  - METSO-programme, nature restoration law, the national biodiversity strategy, closer to nature forest management, etc.

**Thank you!**

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