

Lapland Forest Jury's statement on the climate-wise and fair use of forests of Lapland

INTRODUCTION

Lapland's forests are of great importance in achieving Finland's climate goals. The task of the Lapland Forest Jury, which consisted of residents of Lapland, was to produce a common opinion about how Lapland's forests should be used climate-wise and fairly. An invitation to participate the Jury was sent to 6,000 randomly selected people from the province of Lapland in September 2022. Among the 240 volunteers who responded to the invitation to the Jury 33 people were randomly selected so that the Jury reassembled as well as possible the population of the province of Lapland according to place of residence, gender, age and educational background. The Jury included both forest owners and people who do not own a forest.

The Lapland Forest Jury met on two weekends, November 5–6. and 19–20. During the gatherings the Jury heard expert presentations on the state of Lapland's forests, the use of forests and the effects of climate change and discussed the situation and key issues of forest use in Lapland. In addition, the jury heard experts remotely on November 17. and received written background information on the subject. At the end of its discussions, the Jury formed a joint a statement on the climate-wise and fair use of Lapland's forests that gathered a snapshot of the usage of the forests, the main problem areas and the Jury's recommendations.

The statement is the result of the joint work of the members of the Jury and its recommendations were agreed upon by the members of the Jury. The statement or its parts do not reflect the opinions of any individual member. Organizers or experts did not participate in deciding the content of the statement. The Jury gives up the statement to the Green transition division coordinated by the Regional Council of Lapland.

The Lapland Forest Jury was organized by the Natural Resources Institute Finland, researchers from the University of Turku and the Finnish Environment Institute.

STATEMENT OF THE FOREST JURY

A snapshot of the forest use in Lapland

The Lapland Forest Jury considers that in the climate-wise and fair use of the forests of Lapland it is important to consider the following starting points: Metsähallitus plays an important role in the coordination of different forms of use of the forest. The state is the main owner of Lapland's forests (64%), so it has a huge importance in in decision making related to the use of forests. There are many carbon sinks in Lapland's forests.

Lapland is not one unified region.

As forests have many users (e.g. wind power, tourism, reindeer husbandry, hunting, industry, recreational use, berry picking, mining industry), cooperation and conflict mediation is essential. Coordination is being done e.g. with zoning, which is decided by the municipality.

Tourism is of great importance to Lapland.

Logging in the Sámi's home region has decreased in recent decades, e.g. because logging has been limited for 20 years for more than 10 years ago. The situation has improved due to coordination (camping, tourism, forestry). In addition, 70% all of the country's nature conservation areas are located there.

There are many old forests in Lapland, which are important for biodiversity. Old forests, whose growth has slowed, are not good carbon sinks, but they are carbon storages.

Preserving carbon sinks requires sustainable use. Up-to-date information on carbon sinks is missing.

The need for domestic raw wood material is growing. Securing a sufficient supply of timber is a challenge as the climate changes and demand increases.

The amendment to the Forestry Act (2014) allows renewal logging in the forest, which is younger and where the diameter of trees is smaller than before.

Carbon sinks are reduced when renewal fellings are done too early.

Private forest owners would like to protect forest more often than there is available funding. Funding runs out every year.

Problems with the use of forests

The Lapland Forest Jury considers that the most central problems in the current climate wise and fair use of the forests of Lapland are the following:

Partially conflicting operating pressures are increasing (forestry industry's need for wood, mining, wind power, recreational use, reindeer husbandry, tourism and etc.); at the same time the forests should both compensate emissions and produce raw material for industry.

The demand for raw wood material is increasing, which is a risk for the adequacy and diversity of carbon sinks.

According to the assessment, the Finnish land use sector carbon sinks cover only half of Finland traffic and industrial emissions. The challenge is to combine the needs of different users, different areas and livelihoods, by which fair use of forests in Lapland would be guaranteed. Renewal felling are made at too early in half-grown forests.

Financial challenges of forest protection are unresolved both in private and in state forests.

Metsähallitus must implement the yield requirements set by the Government that are not in line with the climate goals. The problem is, that the Government does not make decisions, but transfers decisions in to the future, even if there are e.g. the Climate Panel's clear recommendations.

The problem is finding reliable, unbiased and popular knowledge and getting an overall understanding what would climate-wise use of forests be.

Recommendations for Regional Council of Lapland and Lapland's Green transition division

So that the use of Lapland's forests could be climate wise and fair, the Jury gives the following recommendations to the Regional Council of Lapland and Lapland's green transition division:

A general and Lapland-wide situational review of forests is needed to improve information flow and to increase transparency. All usage needs require constant monitoring so that the situation would remain sustainable. Metsäkeskus works as an outsider and impartial observing party.

In order to secure the sustainable use of forests, persistence over terms of office is required. Researched knowledge and ability to identify risks are needed to support decision making. This will help to identify the future demand and the adequacy of carbon sinks.

An annual maximum harvesting quota of how much is sustainable to log carbon sinks in terms of maintaining the balance and what is the need to renew forests is needed. The quota must cover both private and state forests as a whole. The purpose of the quota is to limit logging if necessary, it does not

oblige it. The preservation of carbon sinks and the fairness of the division of logging rights are assured with supervision.

The diversity of forests is safeguarded with the right kind with forest management/logging methods.

Finland's emissions should be reduced to the same level as the carbon sinks in an both economically and socially sustainable way. This includes, for example energy production, industry, consumers, traffic and land use emissions.

Open discussion and inclusive planning should be continued, where all parties involved and different stakeholders such as different industries, regions, forest users and forest management associations representatives, are involved. This discussion can be if necessary, also taken to the municipal level. In addition to different interests, different measures must be considered concerning their climate and other environmental effects. Solutions must consider existing knowledge base in addition to opinions.

The Forest Act and Decree should be reviewed considering carbon sinks and carbon stock preservation and increasing. In young undergrowth forests, which are significant in terms of carbon sinks, final fellings should be abandoned, as it was legislated in the previous forest law before the year 2014 according to the trunk diameter.

The motivation of private forest owners should be encouraged for the sustainable use and protection of forests with financial incentives such as taxation and with the help of funding and with informed means of control such as education.

Business operations must genuinely and transparently compensate the harm it causes. However, it must be considered that every harm caused to nature can not be compensated with money. Business operations must avoid environmental damage. Circular economy must be significantly developed so that overconsumption of natural raw materials can be reduced.

The Government must forward without delay The Climate Panel's clear recommendations to rescue carbon sinks. The Government has to reduce Metsähallitus' Metsätalous Oy income requirements and decide that the state forests are not be felled beyond the annual growth of forests. The Regional Council of Lapland and Lapland's MPs must be active in promoting and following these issues.

The Regional Council of Lapland should actively and nationally inform about the importance of Lapland's forests as Finland's carbon sinks and their role in climate change in combat. Citizens should be offered easily approachable and reliable researched information about the climate impact that different forest management and land treatment methods as well as other land use has.