

**RMK DEVELOPMENT PLAN
SUPPLEMENT**

NATURE CONSERVATION



Approved with
RMK Supervisory Board
decision No. 1-11/3
of 16.04.2013

In 2012, the Government approved the Nature Conservation Development Plan until 2020. The objectives of the development plan are directly related to RMK's nature conservation activities. With the following, RMK's development plan will be brought in line with the Nature Conservation Development Plan¹.

OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITIES SO FAR

RMK plans and performs nature conservation activities on state land and assesses the quality of the performed work. In order to do so, RMK has developed the corresponding structure and competence. Nature conservation activities are planned and their quality assessed by the Nature Protection Department; nature conservation activities are organised by the Nature Protection Division. The planning of nature conservation activities takes into account management plans, action plans for the conservation of species as well as expert assessments, based on which RMK's short and long term nature protection plan is prepared.

¹ The nature education and awareness objectives of the Nature Conservation Development Plan are almost identical to the nature conservation and research objectives of RMK's current development plan, which is why the current document does not cover these areas.



1. PROTECTION OF ENDANGERED SPECIES

The first priority of the Nature Conservation Development Plan is to improve the living conditions of the species listed in the Habitats Directive that are in a bad (7) or insufficient (41) condition, as well as of species listed in the Birds Directive, whose condition is considered poor (35%). By the end of the period it is hoped that the situation of 28 species listed in the Habitats Directive has improved and that the situation of 80% of the species listed in the Birds Directive has been assessed as good.

RMK organises the protection of endangered species based on species protection action plans and expert assessments. Species-specific nature conservation activities are carried out primarily in order to restore and to preserve the habitats of Category I protected species *in-situ* (for instance, the habitats of the natterjack toad on Harilaid). The protection of other protected species is carried out primarily through the restoration and maintenance of significant habitat types. The scope of species protection activities will be corrected according to new knowledge and survey data.

1.1 Capercaillie and flying squirrel

Of particular importance to RMK are forest species with extensive habitat requirements and falling numbers, like the **Capercaillie** (*Tetrao urogallus*) and the **flying squirrel** (*Pteromys volans*), whose protection measures have so far been ineffective. In order to determine the habitat requirements for the Capercaillie and achieve a favourable state of the population, RMK will initiate thematic applied research, the results of which will allow for employing effective conservation measures and techniques. For the flying squirrel, the key issue, according to researchers, is the preservation of habitats along with the preservation of connecting corridors between them on a forest landscape. For the preservation of the connecting corridors between the habitats, RMK is developing a methodology for the conservation of habitat corridors and ensures the conservation of these corridors around flying squirrel habitats located on state land.



photo: RIINU RANNAP

THE NATTERJACK TOAD (*BUFO CALAMITA*)



photo: ARNE ADER

THE CAPERCAILLIE (*TETRAO UROGALLUS*)

1.2 Other species

In 2013, the second assessment of the condition of species listed in the EU Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive will be carried out, after which it will be possible to identify the changes that have taken place in the last five years and to assess the impact of existing protection measures. Based on the results of the inventory, a unified species action plan will be prepared in order to improve the situation of the species and, based on that, a specific work schedule will be prepared and put into practice over the following years. The next species inventory, planned for 2018–2019, will provide a chance to assess how effectively the species action plan and the work schedules have been put into practice.



Photo: ARNE AIDER

THE LESSER SPOTTED EAGLE (*AQUILA POMARINA*)

2. FAVOURABLE CONDITION OF HABITATS

The Nature Conservation Development Plan specifies the objective of creating favourable conditions for habitat types with a condition assessed as bad (9) or unfavourable (21) as having improved the conditions in at least 14 of the listed habitat types.

2.1 Restoration and maintenance of semi-natural habitats

At the moment, around 8,000 hectares of semi-natural habitats are being taken care of on land managed by RMK. Those areas already represent most of Estonia's characteristic semi-natural habitat types. According to the national Nature Conservation Development Plan, more attention needs to be paid to the restoration and care of Fennoscandian wooded meadows and Nordic alvars.

On land currently under RMK management, as well as on land currently still owned by the state that will be registered for RMK in the future, there is more than 40,000 hectares of semi-natural habitats. RMK creates the possibilities for the sustainable management of state owned land by concluding long term rental contracts with land managers and by performing cutting and other activities necessary for habitat restoration, when necessary.



photo: ARNE ADER

THE FRAGRANT ORCHID (*GYMNADENIA CONOPSEA*)

2.2 Restoration of endangered swamp and forest habitats

RMK has been dealing with the restoration of swamps since 2010 and by now, with the help of EU Structural Funds, extensive restoration activities have been carried out in the Kuresoo bog, located in Soomaa National Park, and there are currently restoration works under way on several other protected wetlands. RMK's priority areas in the restoration of swamp habitats are Soomaa National Park and the Endla, Muraka and Alam-Pedja nature conservation areas; if possible, also other internationally important swamp conservation areas within the Ramsar and Natura networks.

The restoration of the water regime on these wetlands helps to achieve the objective of the corresponding national development plan and to achieve a favourable state of the habitat types listed in the Habitats Directive.

The area of swamp habitats covered by the restoration activities will be determined in the planning stage.

Suitable methods will be applied to help the recovery of exhausted peat mining areas.

To facilitate the recovery of naturalness of forest habitats, design cutting will be performed and, if necessary, the water regime in the habitats will be adjusted.

3. PROTECTION OF BIODIVERSITY IN COMMERCIAL FORESTS

The objective of the Nature Conservation Development Plan is a situation in which managed ecosystems have great biodiversity and function as habitat corridors between the protected forest areas. RMK employs the following measures to protect the biodiversity in commercial forests:

- retention trees and dead wood are preserved on regeneration cutting areas;
- valuable biotic communities on the edges of open landscapes and water protection zones are preserved;
- the potential impact of the activities planned during forestry improvement works on biodiversity is assessed and alleviating measures are employed;
- in the springtime period, timber harvesting is restricted .

4. DEVELOPMENT OF THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF PROTECTED AREAS

The achieving of nature conservation objectives requires an infrastructure that is suitable for the intensity of use and fit for purpose. The management of semi-natural habitats requires the building or reconstruction of roads, bridges as well as entries and exits on meadows. RMK bases the planning of the nature protection infrastructure on the value of the protected area and maintenance needs. With the help of EU Structural Funds, infrastructure projects have so far been completed or are under way at the Matsalu and Soomaa national parks and at the Alam-Pedja Nature Conservation Area. In the forthcoming period RMK will focus on the development of infrastructure in the said areas, whereas in other protected areas the condition of the infrastructure will be evaluated and improved.

4.1 Marking of protected areas

In 2011–2012 RMK marked around 130 protected areas and more than 100 individual protected sites, putting up a total of more than 2,000 signs. Marking of protected areas will continue in 2013 and the following years with the objective of having all protected areas marked by 2016. Further activities are limited to the maintenance of existing markings and correcting their locations when the outer or zone limits of the protected areas change.

4.2 Protected parks and individual protected natural objects

A separate objective in the Nature Conservation Development Plan is the maintenance and exhibition of protected parks and individual protected natural objects. The maintenance of objects located primarily on state owned land is a priority for RMK. The biggest of these are the reconstruction works at the Keila-Joa and Toila-Oru parks, for which resources from the EU Structural Funds are also foreseen and where work is already under way. The maintenance of other parks and individual protected natural objects takes place as needed.

Table 1. Nature conservation objectives

Objective	2013	2014	2015	2016
Species				
Capercaillie habitat restoration	≥3 areas	≥5 areas	≥5 areas	≥7 areas
Preservation of connectivity between flying squirrel habitats	Mapping of connecting corridors	The connecting corridors have been mapped and a preservation methodology has been developed	Preservation of connecting corridors	Preservation of connecting corridors
Improvement of the condition of other species in a bad or insufficient condition	Inventory ²	Preparation of work schedule based on species action plan	Implementation of the work schedule	Implementation of the work schedule
Habitats				
Area of managed semi-natural habitats	≥10,000 ha	≥12,000 ha	≥14,000 ha	≥16,000 ha
Restoration of semi-natural habitats	Restoration cutting ≥200 ha/y	Restoration cutting ≥300 ha/y	Restoration cutting ≥300 ha/y	Restoration cutting ≥300 ha/y
Restoration of swamp habitats	1,000 ha	2,000 ha	2,000 ha	2,000 ha
Recovery of naturalness of forest habitats	≥20 ha/y	≥30 ha/y	≥40 ha/y	≥50 ha/y
Protection of biodiversity in commercial forests				
Implementation of biodiversity conservation measures	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Infrastructure				
Infrastructure development on the protected areas	Soomaa NP Matsalu NP Alam-Pedja NCA	Soomaa NP Matsalu NP Alam-Pedja NCA	Soomaa NP Matsalu NP Alam-Pedja NCA	Soomaa NP Matsalu NP Alam-Pedja NCA
Marking of protected areas	55%	70%	85%	100%

² Inventory taking by the Ministry of the Environment.



RMK
Toompuiestee 24
10149 Tallinn, Estonia
Phone +372 676 7500
www.rm.k.ee

TEXT:
RMK

DESIGN:
DF
www.df.ee

PHOTO:
Arne Ader (p 3, 4, 5)
Riinu Rannap (p 3)
Lea Tammik (p 1, 2, 9)

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