

Northern Sparsely Populated Areas' (NSPA) views on the EU Framework for Forest Monitoring and Strategic Plans

The Northern Sparsely Populated Areas network, NSPA, represents the interests of the four northernmost regions of Sweden (Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Jämtland Härjedalen and Västernorrland), the seven eastern and northernmost of Finland (Central Ostrobothnia, Kainuu, Lapland, North Karelia, Northern Ostrobothnia, Pohjois-Savo and South Savo), as well as the two northernmost regions of Norway (Nordland, Troms & Finnmark).

With the wider context of the EU Green deal and EU forest strategy being part of it, the EU Framework for Forest Monitoring and Strategic Plans initiative aims to develop EU-wide forest observation framework. It is vital that regional and Arctic dimensions will be considered while drafting the proposal, and Northern Sparsely Populated Areas as one of the most forested areas within the EU play a key role in this goal. The NSPA understands the thoughts behind the suggestion of EU's new Framework for Forest Monitoring and Strategic plans but want to stress that to ensure sustainable forest management in the future, EU forestry related policy and strategic planning must stay on the member state level.

THE NSPA POSITION IN BRIEF

- With a land area covered more than 70 % by forests, Northern regions of Sweden, Finland and Norway are some of the most forest dense regions in Europe, being some of the world's most profound providers of forest information and largest exporters of forest industry products. For these rural areas, forests are crucial from economic, environmental, social, and cultural aspect. The forest sector in northern sparsely populated areas affects the lives of locals in many ways, being a source of prosperity and business. The forest also has other vital values in terms of human recreation and outdoor life.
- Northern Sparsely Populated Areas' Forest industries are supported by world leading forest R&D and climate smart innovations. Forestry in the Nordic countries are regulated by comprehensive national forestry legislations which strongly include environmental considerations. At the same time, there is an obligation to take nature, cultural heritage, tourism, reindeer husbandry and other interests into consideration.
- The NSPA region would like to warn against the creation of duplicate data collection methods and thus unnecessary costs and additional obligations when designing a comprehensive EU forest monitoring system.
- Nordic forest owners are proud of their forests and should continue to be entitled to make decisions about their forests based on the best information available. Collecting and disseminating up-to-date data is important and requires adequate resources across the EU. Instead of creating new EU level data systems, already existing and locally produced data should be harmonized across the EU in a smart and cost-efficient way.

- Therefore, the NSPA regions already rely on large amounts of data collection systems, Finnish examples to be presented below. All these could be extended with other areas or harmonized with other data collection systems within the EU.
- The NSPA calls to utilize local knowledge while developing EU-wide forest information. Ecosystems are diverse depending on different regions, so the monitoring methods should utilize the already existing data collecting methods applicable to natural local conditions.
- The NSPA is concerned about the impact of the initiative on private forest owners. Private forest owners derive their livelihoods from the natural environment, so additional costs and administrative burdens arising from monitoring measures should be avoided or come with substantial monetary compensation.
- The NSPA calls for a review of the weak points of the Copernicus program, such as the inability to distinguish between stand (forest land) and crop (agricultural land) based on satellite data, the lack of tree height data and the dependence of image interpretation on weather conditions and lighting. The shortcomings of the Copernicus program can be addressed by using already tested data collection methods, such as a comprehensive airborne laser scan, with interpretation models calibrated based on forest type-specific plot data, and annual updating of this data by reinterpretation of satellite images.

Examples of data collection systems in the Finnish NSPA area:

- 100 years of the Finland's *[national forest inventory data \(NFI\)](#)*, the comprehensive and up-to-date inventory data produced by the Finnish Forestry Centre on an operational level based on remote sensing, and the role of forest management associations in collecting forest data in Finland. Forest resource data in Finland is open, available to all stakeholders and is used in a wide range of ways in forest use planning, targeting forest management measures, policy preparation and monitoring. Those preparing the forest monitoring initiative should familiarize themselves with the way the Finnish Forestry Centre produces forest and nature data. Forementioned forest resource data is based on laser scanning, aerial photography, measurement of reference plots and tree interpretation. The remote sensing-based tree interpretation network is covering all forests from the 2013 inventory onwards, but the pattern-based forest resource data is being produced primarily for private forests. Pattern data can also be processed for public bodies, such as municipalities, if they are forest owners in [Metsään.fi](#) service. Each year, about 10-12 sites are inventoried in different parts of Finland, with a target total of about 1.5 million hectares of private forests. The inventory cycle is then ten years.
- Besides NFI, Finland has more free digital services for forest owners:
 1. *[statistics of Natural Resources Institute in Finland and <https://www.luke.fi/en/statistics/forest-resources>](#)*
 2. *[Metsään.fi](#)*, <https://www.metsakeskus.fi/en/services>

3. *Forest Centre's open forest information in Finland:*
<https://www.metsakeskus.fi/en/open-forest-and-nature-information>
4. *MOTTI produces tree stand development projections using growth and yield models.* <https://metsainfo.luke.fi/fi/cms/metsankasvu/motti>
5. *Virtual forest 2.0 enables the possibility to observe one's forest in 3D format:* <https://tapio.fi/tiedotteet/virtuaalimetsa-2-0-ovi-uudenlaiseen-metsasuunnitteluun/>
6. *Etapio, world's first mobile application for forest owners to support decision-making in multi-objective forest management:* <https://www.etapio.fi/>
7. *Digital services provided by forest companies to their customers:*
 1. *MetsäForest* <https://metsaverkko.metsagroup.com/landing/fi/>
 2. *Storaenso eMetsä* <https://emetsa.fi/>
8. *Applications based on open forest resource information that are openly available to all, rapid forest estate assessment programmes that can assess the forests owned by anyone:*
 1. *Metsä Forest* <https://www.metsaforest.com/fi/Puukauppa/Pages/Metsatilan-pika-arvio.aspx>
 2. *UPM Forest value calculator:* <https://www.upmmetsa.fi/metsan-arvo-laskuri/metsanarvolaskuri/>
 3. *StoraEnso forest value calculator* www.storaensometsa.fi/selvita-metsasi-arvo
 4. *OP Forest appraisal service for forest owners* <https://www.op.fi/private-customers/themes/services-for-forest-owners/op-private-for-forest-owners/op-forest-appraisal>