

Gauja National Park

Natura 2000 territory

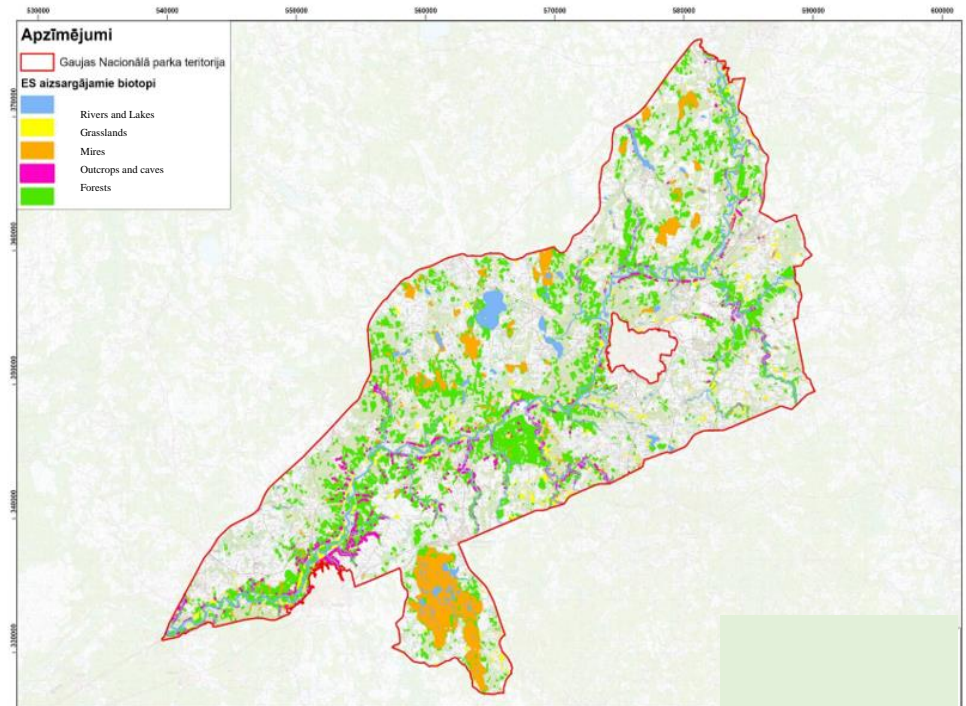
Gauja National Park (LV0200100)

Area: 91786 ha

Foundation Year: 1973 (Latvia's first and oldest National park)

Importance of protection:

Unique nature values of the Ancient Valley of river Gauja and its surroundings. The Devon sandstone outcrops (geomorphological monuments) are particularly representative. 32 types of habitats of European importance with a total area of 18 862 ha or 20.4% of the total territory have been identified. Forests occupy 47% of the Park area. Highly rich flora and fauna: more than 800 species of vascular plants, 149 bird species, 48 mammalian species.



LIFE+ Nature project, „Forest Habitat Restoration within the Gauja National Park” LIFE10NAT/LV/000159 FOR-REST

Duration: 1 September 2011 – 31 March 2016

Coordinating beneficiary: Nature Conservation Agency

Associated beneficiaries: Institute for Environmental Solutions, Latvian Fund for Nature, Elm Media

- **Total Project budget** - 823 243 EUR
- **ES financial contribution** - 493.946 EUR
- **Other financial contributions** - Latvian Environmental Protection Fund

Area: Natura 2000 site Gauja National Park (Pārgauja Municipality and Sigulda)

Main objective: To develop a long-term forest habitat restoration and management program for the protection of *Bog woodland (91D0*)*, *Western taiga (9010*)* and *Forests of slopes, scree and ravines (9180*)* in 280-300 ha, as well as to test and demonstrate innovative habitat inventory methods and implement good practice measures in habitat restoration in the territory of the Gauja National Park.

Focus on dry pine forests within the framework of the FOR-REST project

Of all forests in Latvia, 10% are habitats of EU importance. The most common forest habitat *Western taiga (9010*)* occupies 30% of forest habitats in Latvia. The existence of coniferous old-growth dry pine forests are endangered, the forest soil is gradually becoming more and more fertile. Plants and trees that are not typical in these habitats start to inhabit and the forest overgrows with thick tree layer. Species that love dry, sunny environment lose their habitat.

FOR-REST project imitated naturally occurring processes (windfalls, wood fires etc.) by introducing natural forest key elements to planted forests: withered standing trees (snags), fallen dead wood (coarse woody debris), trees fractured by wind (trunks), windfalls and openings in the forest stand were created artificially.

Methods of habitat management

The managed forest stands occupied a total of 282.5 ha, or 58% of the forest massif. There were the different ages of forest stands in the following proportions: 35–60 year-old stands 5%, 61–90 year-old 36%, 91-120 year-old 41%, 121-150 year-old 17%, older stands 1%.

The forest stands were divided into four groups by the method of habitat management:

- No management was performed, the best solution was non-interference (48% of the total area of forest stands, habitat *Western taiga 9010**)
- Clearing of old solitary pines from young trees (in two stands)
- Development of forest canopy gaps and increasing the quantities of dead or drying wood (77,4 ha)
- Controlled burning of the forest massif-canceled



The results

In 2022 the works for the forest habitat restoration in the stand have been evaluated and found to be successful. Today, the territory complies with the minimum quality criteria for habitat *Western taiga (9010*)*. In view of that – the territory has been mapped and listed as the EU priority protected forest habitat.

