



Private Landowners and Forest Biodiversity Conservation – the METSO Programme in Finland

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METSO Programme 2008-2025

- The main goal is to halt the ongoing decline in forest species and habitats and establish favourable trends in forest biodiversity
- The programme is coordinated by the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
- A new phase of the METSO Programme is currently being prepared and is scheduled to begin in early 2026
- The METSO Programme will largely continue in the form familiar to landowners: voluntary conservation and nature management will remain at its core



METSO Programme 2008-2025

Elements of the METSO Programme (14)

- Improve the conservation area network
- Enhance biodiversity in commercially managed forests
- Promote collaboration between the forest and environmental sectors, landowners, and other stakeholders
- Strengthen the knowledge base on forest biodiversity
- Increase communication, education, and monitoring

Most concrete actions

- Goal: To increase the network of protected areas with 96 000 ha (Min.Env.) → achieved 2008-2024, €449M
- Goal: To safeguard biodiversity on 82 000 hectares of forest habitats in commercially managed forests (Min.Agr.For.) → 80 % achieved 2008-2024, €119M



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METSO Programme 2008-2025

Implemented by regional environmental and forest authorities

METSO options: Permanent protection

- Private nature reserve (ownership remains)
 - Compensation based on timber value
- Purchase by the state
 - Price based on timber value and value of the land
- Land exchange (with state-owned land)



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METSO Programme 2008-2025

METSO options: Temporary conservation

- Forestry environmental aid contract, 10 years
 - Compensation mostly based on timber value
- (Temporary nature reserve, 20 years)

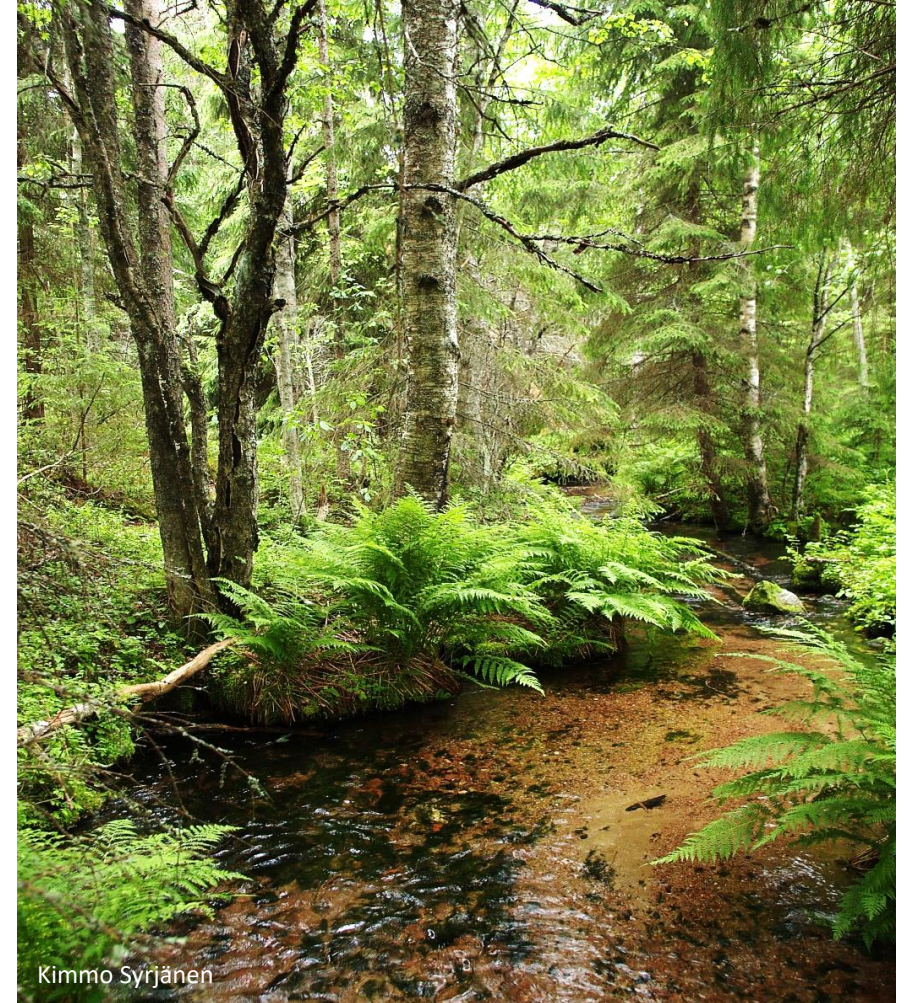
METSO options: Nature management projects

- Include measures to enhance valuable natural features in forest habitats (e.g. management of herb-rich forests)
- Projects often involve multiple forest holdings



The shopping list: ten forest habitat types with high biodiversity value

- Herb-rich forests
- **Heath forests with high biodiversity (old-growth, abundant dead wood)**
- **Wooded mires and open mires with forest margins**
- Forests by watercourses
- Flooded forests and forest swamps
- Esker forests
- Wooded meadows and forest pastures
- Wooded cliffs, bluffs and boulder fields
- Calcareous and ultramafic rocky habitats
- Forests at uplifting coastline



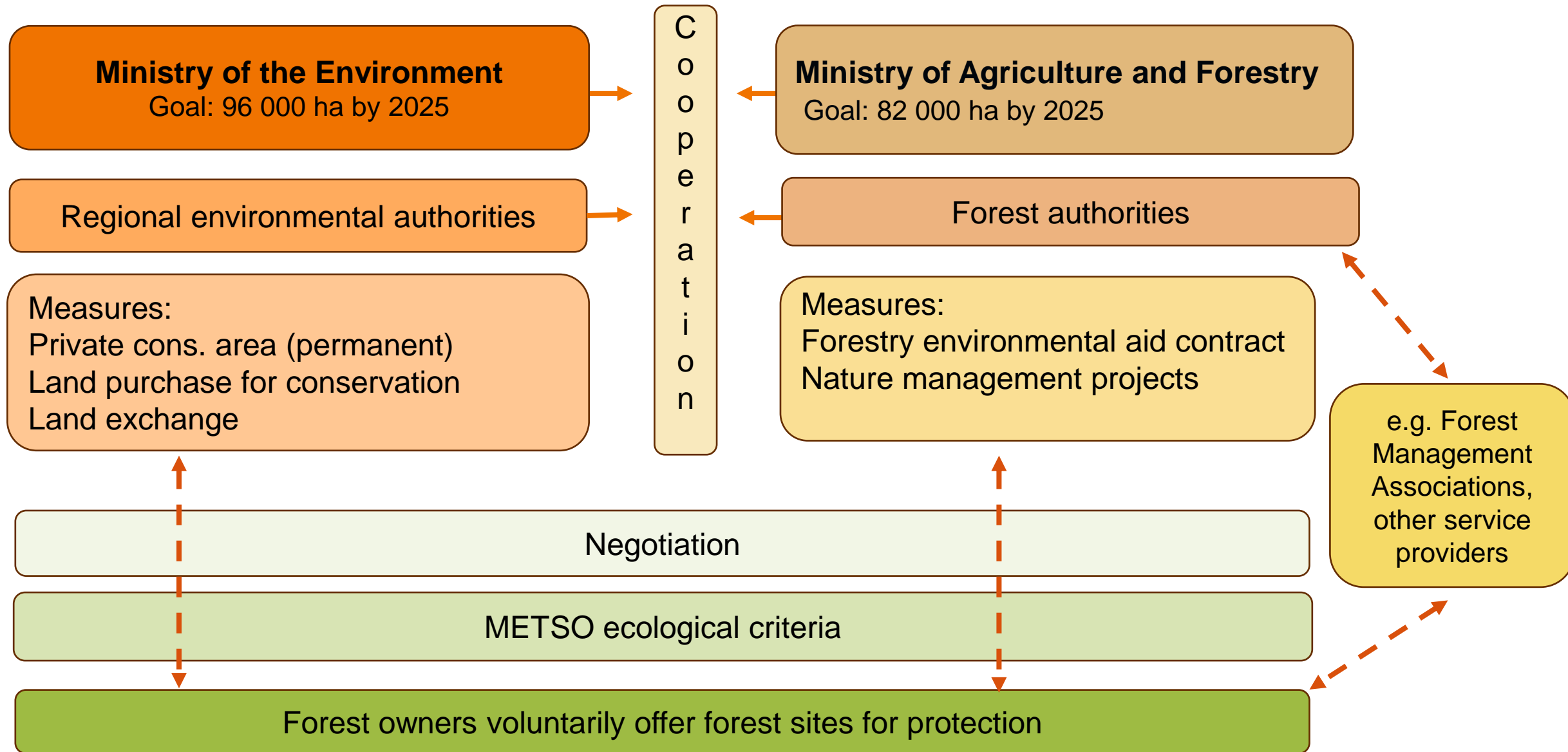
Shopping list – site selection criteria of METSO

- Each habitat type has its own set of criteria
- The criteria include three quality classes (I–III), mainly based on structural characteristics (e.g. age, amount of dead wood, tree species composition)
- Presence of threatened species
- Size and connectivity to existing conservation areas
- Social criteria (e.g. ecotourism, recreational value) may also be considered to some extent
- Large sites with multiple high-quality habitats are the most desirable



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METSO process



METSO Programme is a tool:

EU Biodiversity Strategy targets

- Permanent protection, old-growth forest protection in private forests
- METSO forestry environmental aid contracts contribute to Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures OECA

Nature Restoration Regulation and The National Restoration Plan (under preparation)

- Nature management

Helmi Habitats Programme

Enhances biodiversity by protecting, restoring and managing mires, waterfowl habitats, semi-natural grasslands and forests habitats, as well as small waters bodies and shore habitats. The aim is also to promote ecosystem services, water protection and carbon sequestration, and climate change adaptation.

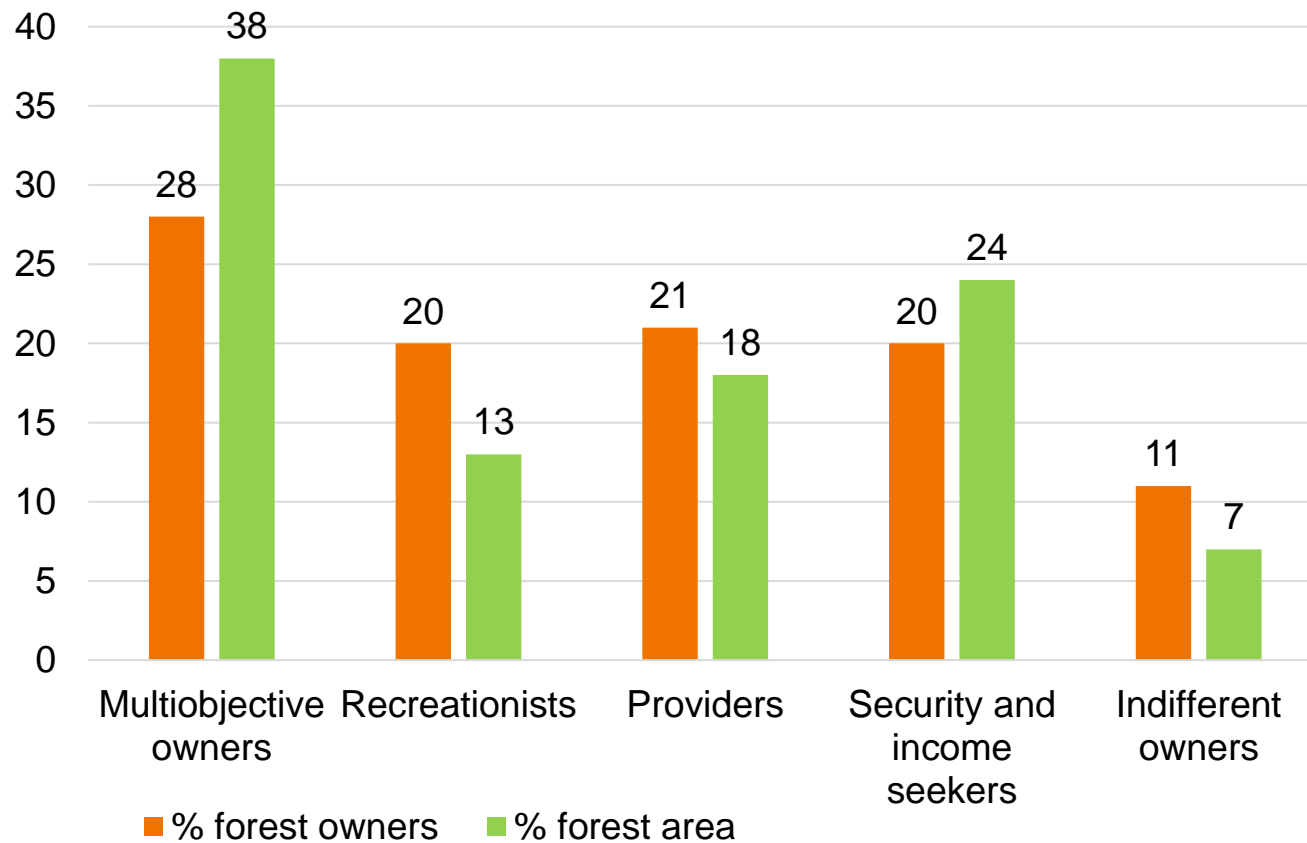
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Motivations for forest owner participation

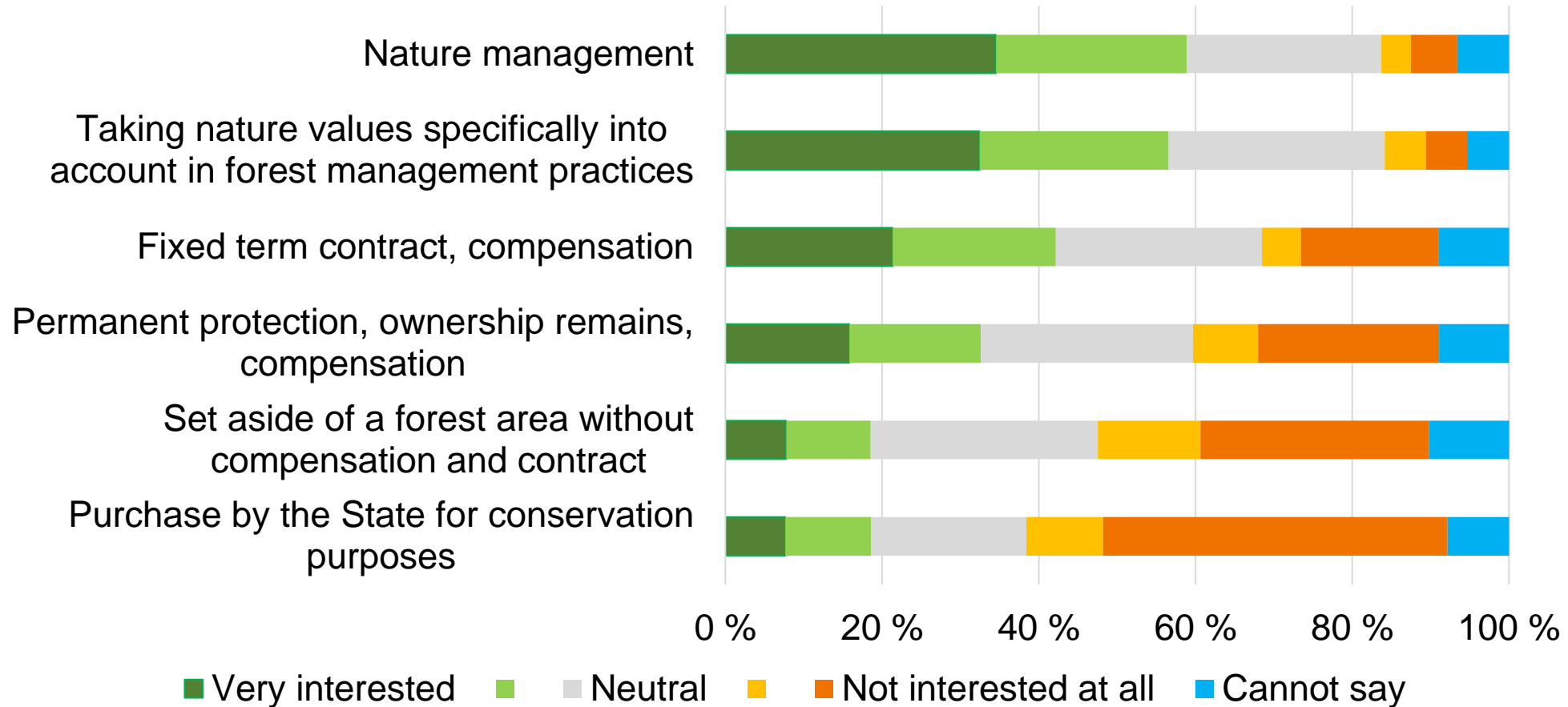
Forest owners' objectives for their forest ownership



- **Multiobjective owners:** economic benefits, work opportunities as well as amenity values and outdoor recreation
- **Recreationists:** nature protection, maintenance of forest scenery, outdoor recreation
- **Providers:** outdoor recreation and work opportunities
- **Security and income seekers:** economic benefits such as security for old age and regular timber sales income
- **Indifferent owners:** no specific objectives

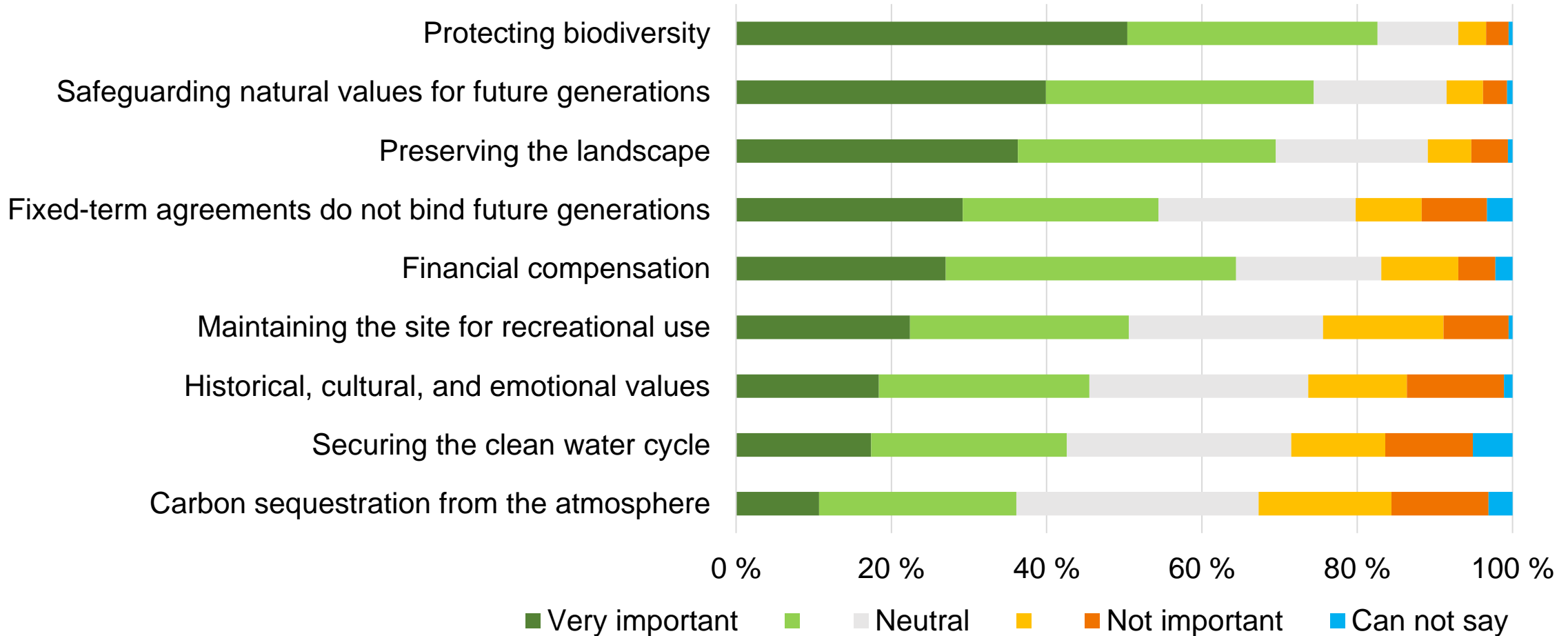
Motivations for forest owner participation

Forest owners' willingness to implement measures to safeguard biodiversity in their own forests



Motivations for forest owner participation

Importance of different aspects in forest owner's decision to enter a forestry environmental aid contract

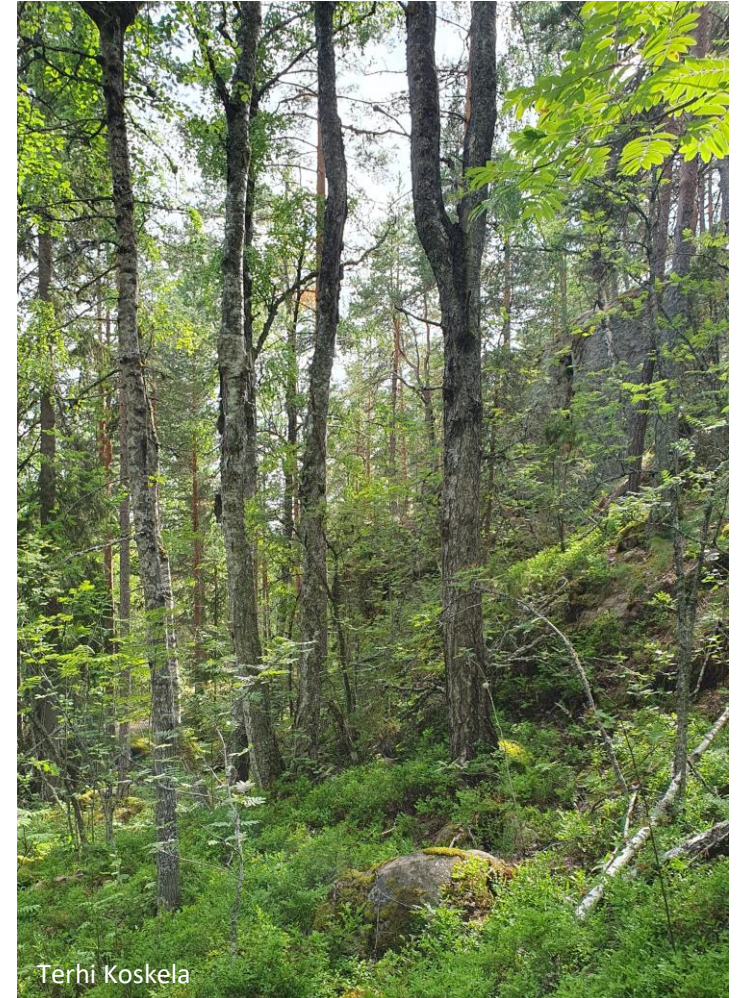


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Source: Koskela et al. 2022. <https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-380-490-6>

Motivations and challenges for forest owner participation

- Forest owners are a heterogeneous group with diverse characteristics and objectives for forest ownership
- Various measures are needed to safeguard forest biodiversity
- Voluntary participation is key to ensuring acceptance. Compensation, a sense of fairness, and trust are also crucial.
- Forest professionals play an important role
- Communication and sharing of peer experiences are important
- A positive approach in communication is essential
- The conservation initiative should be easy for forest owners to adopt

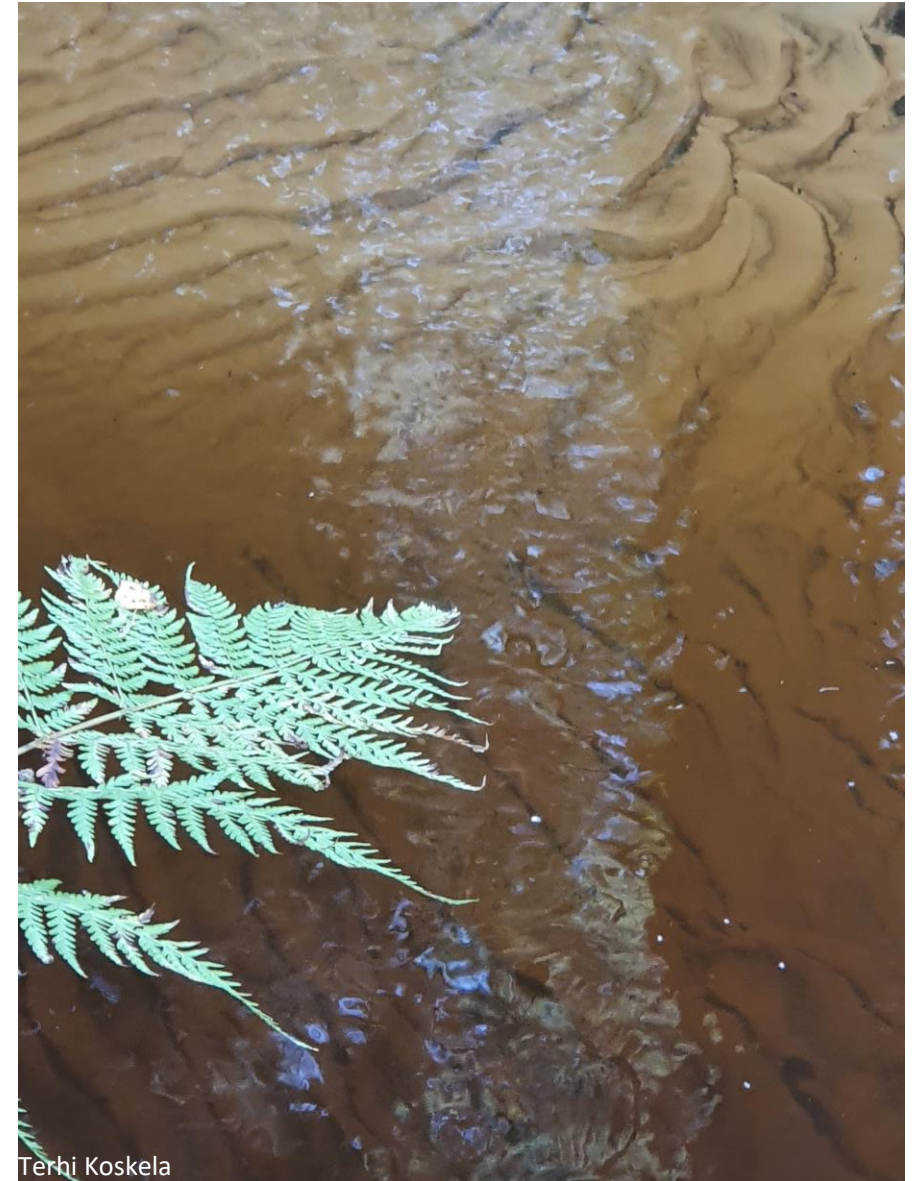


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Motivations and challenges for forest owner participation

- Targeted outreach can be used to seek offers from forest owners in a specific area, for specific habitat types or for connectivity
- Decision support for marketing and site selection (GIS-based conservation planning tool Zonation)
- Resource constraints may cause a time lag between offering a site for protection and the actual conservation decision
- Not all forest owners are aware of the possibilities for voluntary conservation
- Forest owners' willingness and ability to use digital services varies, which can affect access to information and guidance

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Keys to effective cooperation

- Cooperation between ministries, authorities, stakeholders, municipalities, state land administrators
- Considering the views of forest owners
- METSO uses conservation instruments that were already in use before the programme → easier implementation on a larger scale
 - State funding models are subject to regulatory constraints, which may limit flexibility
- Regional pilots: new innovations, involvement of new actors, but broader implementation may be challenging
- Projects developing nature management, and cooperation networks: new operating methods and guidance materials
- Research and monitoring



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Keys to effective cooperation

- Training and education
 - Important data resources: National Forest Inventory, forest resource data, species data
 - Mainstreaming biodiversity considerations
 - Increased dialogue, education, communication, cooperation, and monitoring require resources and time
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- Final evaluation of the METSO Programme:
Horne et al. 2025. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-873-4>

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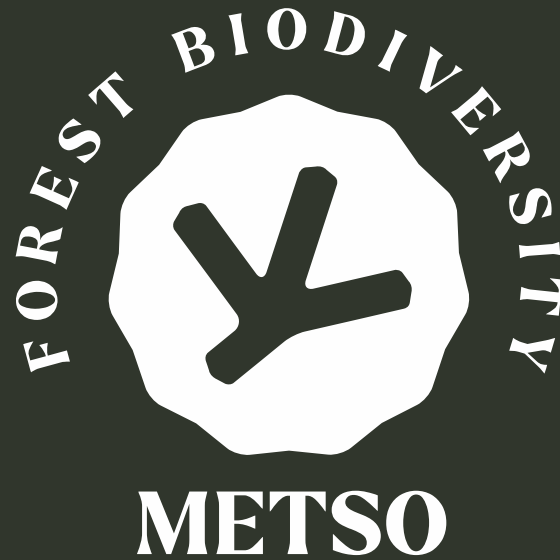


METSO has become a widely accepted positive “brand” in Finland with a good reputation among forest owners and stakeholders

[More info in English:](#)
[METSOwebsite](#)



Thank you very much!



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