



**Carrying capacity
of recreational forest areas
in changing conditions**

Pertti Itkonen 15.11.2021

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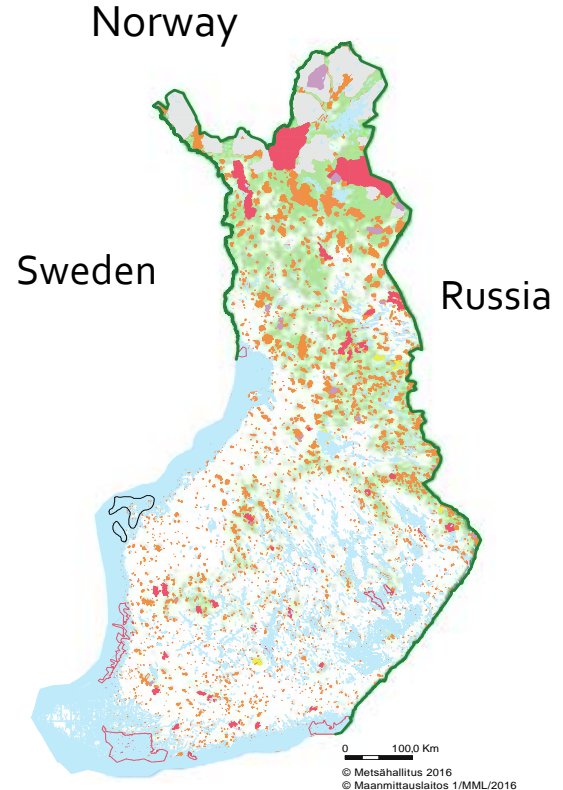
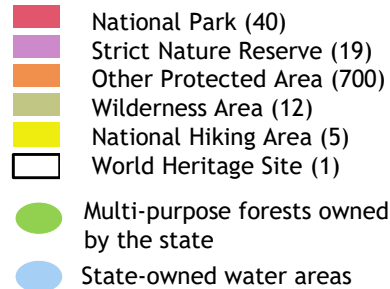
- Metsähallitus - manager of land and waters owned by the state of Finland
- Outdoor recreation in Finland
- Changes in environment: Covid-19, climate change
- Problems and challenges: focus on national parks in Lapland



Metsähallitus

- State-owned enterprise
- Forestry and real estate business
- Management of protected areas
- Public recreational services and infrastructure
- Fish and game management
- Separated public and business budgets and properties

9,1 million
hectares of land,
including
3,2 million
hectares of protected
and wilderness areas
3,4 million hectares of waters
330 million € turnover
1200 employees

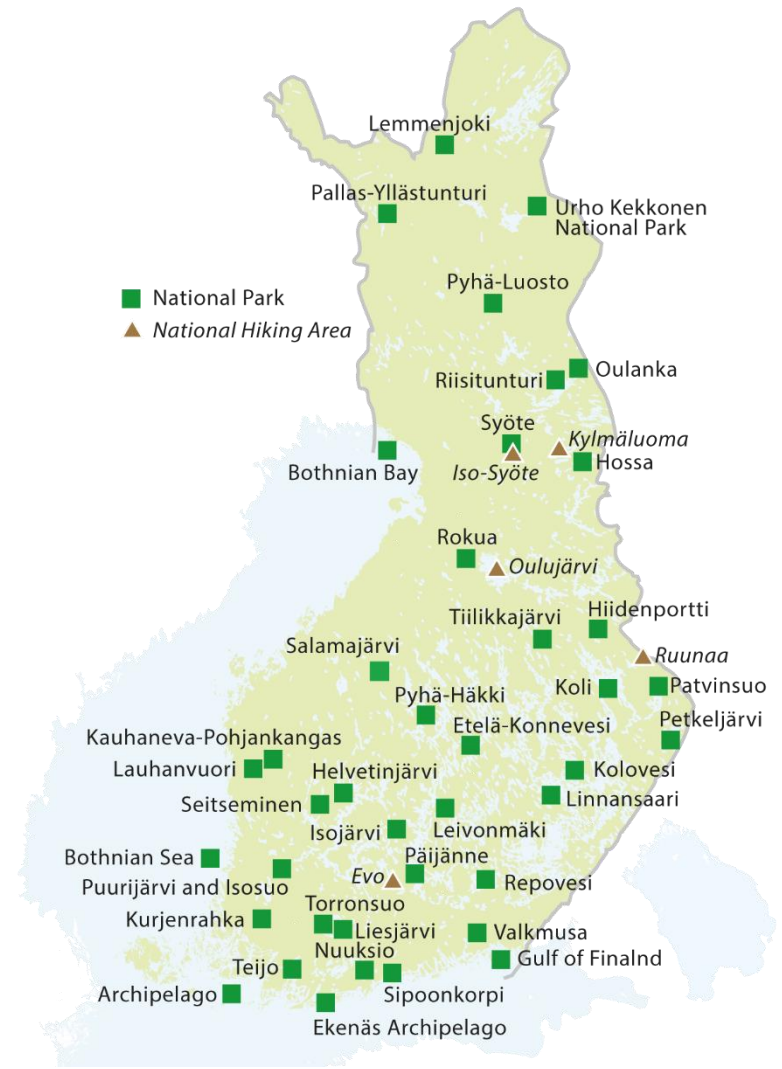


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Parks & Wildlife Finland – public services of Metsähallitus

- Manager of all state-owned areas reserved for nature conservation and outdoor recreation:
 - **40** national parks
 - **19** strict nature reserves
 - **5** national hiking areas
 - **12** wilderness areas in Lapland
 - over **3,000** other protected areas
 - and cultural heritage sites



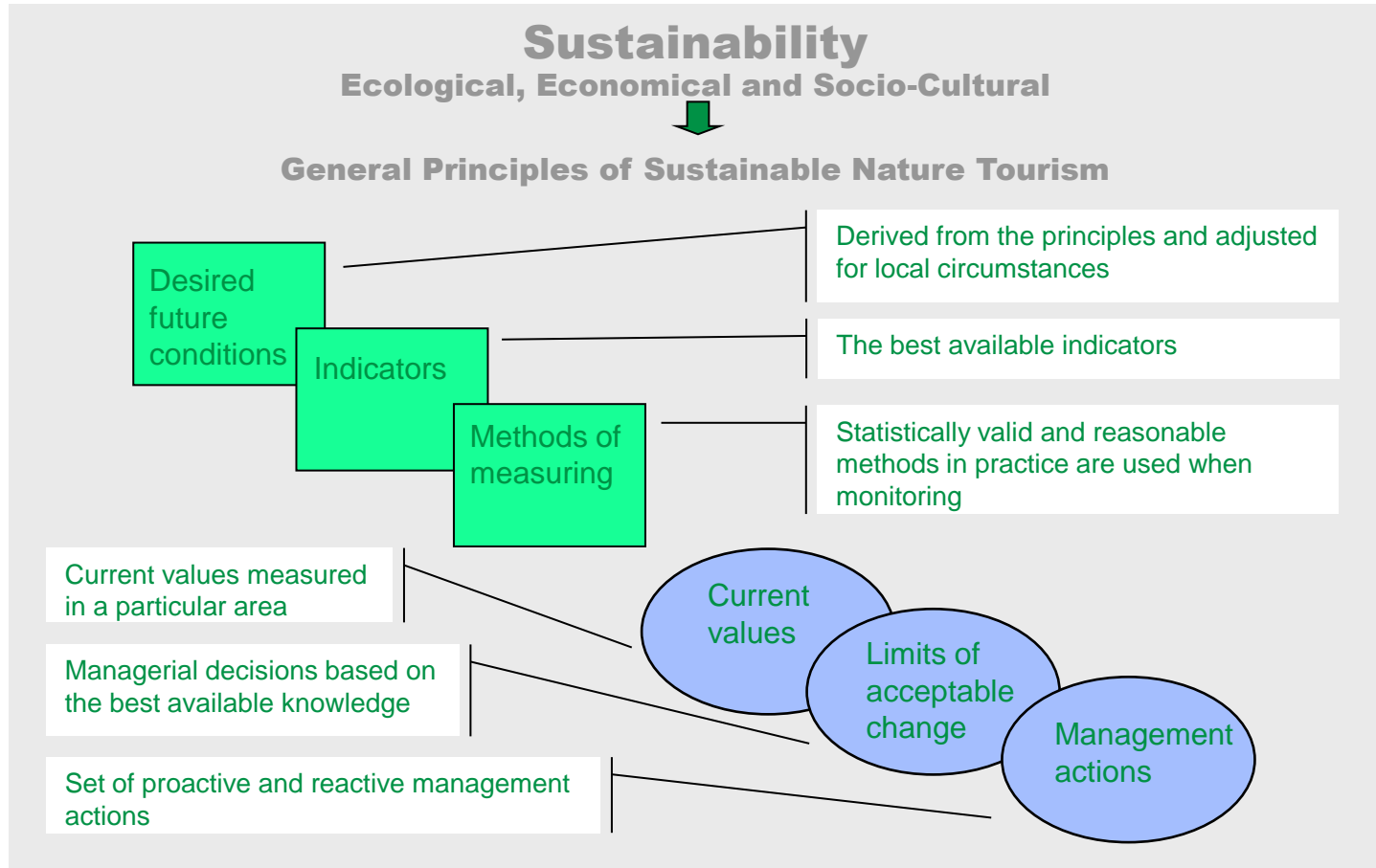
Outdoor recreation in land use

- Land ownership in Finland:
 - 60 % private people, 30 % state, 10 % companies and societies
 - Protected and wilderness areas cover 13 % of land area
- Most areas have free access and other “everyman’s rights”
 - > almost all areas, private, public and protected are in recreational use
- Demand of outdoor recreation can be divided to
 - Local recreational use by people living in the area or nearby
 - Nature tourism from Finland and abroad
- Finland is sparsely populated and population is focused on southern part
 - > Local recreation dominates in areas nearby Helsinki and other large cities
 - > Nature tourism is more important in remote areas, especially in Lapland, mainly concentrated in tourist resort
 - > Local rights of land use e.g. berry-picking, fishing, hunting and ATV’s are important in rural areas

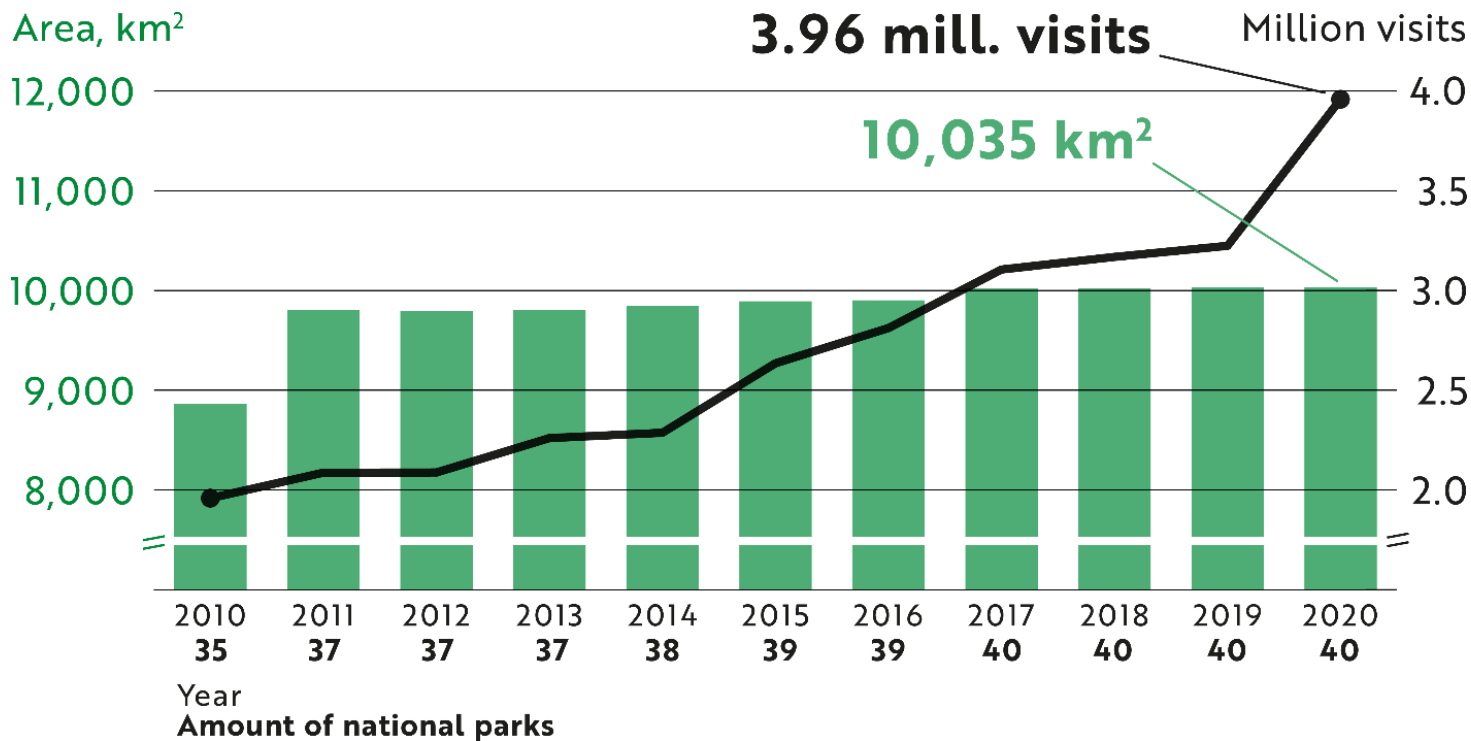
Strategic guidelines in Metsähallitus

- Management principles of protected areas changed ca. 2000
 - Acceptance and support to protected areas via promotion of tourism
 - Concentration of infrastructure and public services in most attractive areas near tourism resorts and private services - national parks
 - Cooperation with tourism businesses to strengthen their brands
 - > Easier and more effective control and management
 - > Negative impact reduced by better infrastructure
 - > Public investment “10 x payback” to local economy
 - > Other areas are in less intensive recreational use - for nature protection, other land use and locals
- Standardized visitor counting and survey methods developed
- General Principles of Sustainable Nature Tourism created
- Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) method adopted in visitor management of protected areas - instead of predefined “carrying capacity”

An Adoption of the LAC process in Metsähallitus



Number of visits increased





Number of visits to national parks in Lapland 2020

National Park	Number of visits	Change from 2019, %
Pallas-Yllästunturi NP	563 100	0
Urho Kekkonen NP	372 300	+1
Oulanka NP	235 800	+25
Pyhä-Luosto NP	204 500	+21
Riisitunturi NP	67 100	+53
Lemmenjoki NP	21 700	+18
Bothnian Bay NP	5 000	-23
Total	1 469 500	+8

Biodiversity attracts tourism



Photo: Hannu Vallas Metsähallitus

In landscape level...



Photo: Tiina Laitinen Metsähallitus

...habitat level...

...and species level



Photo: Elina Ode Metsähallitus



Problems caused by Covid-19

- Overcrowding on trails and campsites.
- New user groups not familiar with outdoor etiquette.
- Traffic and parking place congestion.
- Wild parking of campers.
- Confrontation between tourism and traditional livelihood and local recreation.
- Increased erosion and disturbance.
 - ***Problems for ecological and social sustainability***
- Foreign tourists compensated by domestic.
- Changes in tourism seasons.
- Reduced consumption of certain private tourism services.
 - ***Problems for economic sustainability in local societies***
- Simultaneously, MTB's and electric bikes have made a breakthrough in outdoor recreation



Challenges of climate change

- Climate change is strengthening towards north, but time scale is slow, compared to Covid 19.
- Mitigation measures in national level, adaptation in local level.
- Arctic species and biotopes are most vulnerable.
- Risk of landscape level disasters like storms, wildfires, insect damages etc. has increased.
- Seasons are changing, in nature and tourism.
- CO² emission limits may reduce flights and foreign tourism in remote areas.
- Global interest to the Arctic will increase.



What's next?

- Preparedness to sudden changes caused by pandemics, natural catastrophes and tourism dynamics in management.
- LAC are closing – time to renew strategy?
- More efficient guiding and information campaigns to reduce negative impacts.
- Up-to-date GIS data from visitors and their impact on nature.
- More supervision of tourism in protected areas.
- Infrastructure and services distributed to public multi-purpose forests and other recreational areas.



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