

# Forest protection – formal and voluntary

Photo: Leif Öster. Sveaskog's image bank



◀ The formal types of protection are national parks, nature reserves, protected biotopes, conservation agreements and Natura 2000 nature protection areas.

Natural ecosystems are affected by modern forestry and therefore it is important that certain areas of forestland are not exploited, but rather set aside for conservation purposes. The Swedish forestry model aims to use a landscape approach to ensure biodiversity while also maintaining and developing high and profitable forest production and high social values. The model rests on three cornerstones as regards conservation measures: formal reserves, voluntary reserves and general considerations in managed forests. The formal types of protection are national parks, nature reserves, protected biotopes, conservation agreements and Natura 2000 nature protection areas.

## National parks

The aim with national parks is that they should represent widely distributed and unique Swedish landscape types in a system that encompasses all of Sweden. Each national park should cover at least 1,000 hectares and be able to protect nature effectively while still being accessible for research, outdoor pursuits and tourism without damaging these natural values. The parks are managed by the county administrative boards, but the government decides whether a national park should be established. In 1909, Sweden inaugurated its first nine national parks, which were also the first of their kind in Europe, and these included Gotska Sandön, Abisko and Stora Sjöfallet.

Sweden's first national marine park, Kosterhavet, was inaugurated in 2009. As of 2018, there are 29 national parks in Sweden, with plans to create another

five national parks over the next few years. Sweden's largest national park is Padjelanta in Norrbotten, while the smallest is Dalby Söderskog in Skåne.

National parks are found throughout the world and the USA was the first country to establish a national park, Yellowstone in 1872. The world's largest national park is situated in northeast Greenland and is twice the size of Sweden.

## Nature reserves

The most common form of protection in Sweden is the nature reserve, of which there are more than 4,500 in Sweden. A large share of the protected land area is located in the Swedish mountains. Municipalities and county administrative boards decide on the establishment of nature reserves and their purpose is to preserve biodiversity, as well as valuable natural

environments and habitats important to threatened species.

Compared with national parks, nature reserves are generally smaller and more flexible when it comes to boundaries and management. In most nature reserves, nature is left to develop freely, although in some cases measures may be taken to favour particular natural habitats, such as controlled burns or thinning the forest adjacent to biologically valuable trees. Each nature reserve has its own regulations, so if you would like to know more about a particular reserve, you can search for information on the website of the concerned county administrative board. These websites also indicate where the nearest nature reserve is located and points of interest you may like to visit.

### Protected biotopes

A protected biotope is usually a smaller area of high value to flora and fauna. The Swedish Forest Agency has defined nineteen different biotope types that can be designated protected biotopes and they usually measure 2-10 hectares in size.

Examples of biotope types are burned forests, forested ravines, springs, land with very old trees and various water-related biotopes. The landowner receives a one-off payment from the state as compensation for the infringement in exploitation that the decision entails. They may not pursue forestry in the area, but retain ownership of the land.

### Conservation agreements

A conservation agreement is entered into between a landowner and the state under the management of the Swedish Forestry Agency, the county administrative board or the municipality. The agreement is an arrangement between the landowner and the state on how to manage or preserve a particular forest area. For example, it could be a forest used regularly for outdoor pursuits, in which case the landowner can manage the forest with extra consideration for social values. Or it could be a forest with high natural values and the landowner agrees to leave the forest untouched in return for financial compensation. In some cases, the landowner also commits to managing the forest in a way that favours certain natural values.

The agreements are entered into for a set period, the shortest being one year and the longest being fifty years.

One example of a conservation agreement is the agreements entered into between Sveaskog and the Swedish Forest Agency regarding Sveaskog's eco-

parks. Ecoparks are larger landscapes covering at least 1,000 hectares where at least half of the forestland is earmarked for conservation purposes.

### Natura 2000

Natura 2000 is a network of protected forests originating from the EU's Habitats Directive. This directive aims to protect animals and plants considered to be of European interest from extinction by ensuring that their habitats are not destroyed.



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In Sweden, there are about 4,000 areas designated as Natura 2000 nature protection areas, many of which overlap with existing national parks and nature reserves. The county administrative boards are tasked with proposing new Natura 2000 nature protection areas, which the government then forwards to the European Commission for a decision on whether they should be included in Natura 2000. Such nature protection areas must have a conservation plan identifying natural values and describing what needs to be done in the long term to preserve them. A permit is required to pursue forestry in a Natura 2000 nature protection area, and this is most often a matter of drawing up appropriate considerations. Natura 2000 encompasses 18% of the EU's land area and 6% of the EU's marine territory. When new countries apply to join the EU, one of the requirements is that they submit proposals for areas that can qualify for the Natura 2000 scheme. European Natura 2000 Day is celebrated on 21 May each year, with various prizes awarded for the management of Natura 2000 nature protection areas.

### Voluntary reserves

Voluntary reserves are areas that forest owners voluntarily exclude from forestry activities without receiving any financial compensation. For example, forest owners with environmental certification from the FSC are to exclude 5% of their productive forestland from traditional forestry and instead develop its biodiversity. This is achieved by reserving key biotopes and other areas with high natural values.