

TRANSLATION OF THE PRESS RELEASE BY RESEARCHERS:

Open letter to the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry 7.2.2007 Researchers appeal to save natural forests

A group of Finnish researchers has today delivered an open letter to the Minister of forestry, Juha Korkeaoja. In the letter the researchers appeal to save the remaining natural forests. The researchers also present reasons why they think the preservation of the old natural forests that are still located outside of protected areas is necessary from ecological, social and cultural points of view. The letter has been signed by 77 Finnish forefront researchers, among them 30 professors from different universities and research institutes. The researchers represent the field of forest related science widely and include representatives from forest sciences, economics, ecology, geography and cultural research.

For more information, please contact

Ilkka Hanski, academy professor, (biodiversity of the forests), tel. +358 9 191 57745, ilkka.hanski@helsinki.fi

Olli Tahvonen, professor, (environmental economics) tel. +358 10 2112210, olli.tahvonen@metla.fi

Timo Kuuluvainen, docent (forest ecology), tel. +358 9 191 58116, timo.kuuluvainen@helsinki.fi

TRANSLATION OF THE OPEN LETTER

Open letter to the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, 7. February 2007 Researchers appeal to save old natural forests

To:
Juha Korkeaoja
Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
Hallituskatu 3 A, Helsinki
P.O. Box 30, 00023 Valtioneuvosto
Finland

Honourable Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Juha Korkeaoja,

We wish to present Finnish researchers' concerns about loggings in old natural forests and publicise our opinion as to why preservation of these forests is in our estimation indispensable.

Alongside climate change, the rapid loss of biodiversity is one of the most serious trends humankind is facing. These two threats go hand in hand. The Millennium

Ecosystem Assessment (2005, www.maweb.org), which was carried out by more than one thousand researchers, shows that the loss of biodiversity and the related decline of ecosystem functions, especially the loss of natural forests, continues all over the world. Natural forests are scarce in Europe, hence their biological, social and cultural value is especially significant and will grow in future. Of species classified as threatened in Finland, 37% have forest as their primary habitat.

Biodiversity in our forests is especially threatened in southern Finland, where natural or near-natural forests remain in only 1-2% of the forest area. In southern Finland the survival of species communities dependent on natural forests is in danger, and populations of many species have declined to regional extinction. Finland is committed to maintaining large natural areas and to stop the decline of biodiversity by 2010 e.g. through our signing the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, The EU strategy for sustainable development (2001) and IUCN's Countdown 2010 initiative. This goal can no longer be achieved, but to stop the decline of biodiversity as quickly as possible it will be necessary to supplement the nature reserve network in southern Finland with sites that have remained in as biologically a natural state as possible.

Northern Finland's natural forests have exceptionally great importance for biodiversity because they are large and continuous. These features make the long-term survival of species possible as well as the functioning of natural disturbance dynamics and evolutionary processes. Habitat changes via climate change will emphasise further the value of northern forests. Both the level of protection and the area of remaining old natural forests is considerably higher in the North than in southern Finland, but current trends are alarming. According to the Finnish Forest Research Institute, the area of near-natural forest (stands over 140 years old, containing elements typical of natural forests) in the northern boreal zone has decreased from 17 % to 14.5% between the two most recent state land inventories. This means that 1000 km² of these forests were lost in a decade. It is also noteworthy that the proportion of protected near-natural forest is less than 7% of the forested area in the northern boreal zone, even if more than 10% of northern Finland's forests in total (forest and non-productive forest land together) is protected (ref: Etelä-Suomen metsien monimuotoisuusohjelman tutkimusraportti, MMM ym. 2006).

The natural development of Lapland's forest ecosystems is so slow that logging in its remaining old natural forests cannot be considered a sustainable use of natural resources. Development of an old forest with large amounts of decaying wood of different types takes such a long time that social, economic and global environmental conditions will probably change completely in this time. Hence it can be reasonably stated that logging of natural forests causes irreversible change of habitat, and destroys an important part of our national heritage as well as genetic and species diversity. As a result, present and intended loggings in forested Lapland (e.g. Pokka-Pulju and Raakevuoma in Kittilä, Peurakaira in

Sodankylä and Turjalaiset in Savukoski) are unsustainable and in obvious conflict with the biological diversity conservation agreements to which Finland is committed.

Although saving forestry-related jobs is extremely important from a rural and social perspective, it should not be used as an excuse to destroy ecosystems whose undisturbed development spans thousands of years. It is important to take into account that northern Finland contains a considerable area of younger commercial stands that have regrown since their heavy logging of the 1950s. Carrying out thinning and other forestry measures in these forests, now in an accelerated period of growth, would generate employment, speed the forests' growth, and improve the quality of the resulting timber.

The annual increment of timber growth within the Lapland forest administration region has in the last decade increased from 8 million cubic metres per annum to 12 million. The corresponding timber reserve has increased from 260 million cubic metres at the beginning of the 1970s to 340 million. Forestry or logging opportunities in Lapland are therefore in no way threatened. Sustainable commercial forestry in northern Finland should be based on forests already applied to commercial use, not on logging those remaining in a natural state.

Metsähallitus (The Finnish National Forest Service) is also taking a considerable risk in extending logging to higher altitudes and shelterwoods that earlier were left outside commercial use. These areas contain much old forest in a natural state. Initiation of logging at high-altitude sites is based on a crude and scientifically uncertain generalisation that climatic warming will create conditions more favourable to these forests' regeneration. Such assumptions take no account of the precautionary principle that should be an integral part of all Environmental Impact Assessments. Even if a growth in the average temperature may add to timber growth in the next decades, the accompanying increase in aberrant weather may cause severe forest regeneration problems.

Commercial forestry practiced in old natural forests causes significant and long term problems to other forms of commercial use such as traditional reindeer herding, hunting, and tourism. Indigenous peoples' cultures are the focus of increasing international attention. Safeguarding and improving reindeer herding conditions are a key element in preserving the culture of Finland's own indigenous people, the Sámi.

Reindeer husbandry and forestry cannot be compared by evaluating the immediate commercial value they generate, because the former also brings significant knock-on effects not only to the Sámi culture, but also to the Lapp tourist industry and Finland's international image.

The attraction and economic significance of the North's untouched forest environments can be assumed to further increase in the future. Already there is a

contradiction between logging of old forest of near-natural conditions and tourism. In the Lapp municipality of Ylimuonio negotiations are ongoing between Metsähallitus and local tour operators, where the latter are offering to pay Metsähallitus the price of lost timber if they forgo logging. If the local businesses' willingness to pay is greater than the net price Metsähallitus can expect to receive for this timber, in any corresponding case it is always in society's interest to forgo such logging independent of whether the payment is actually made or not. That Metsähallitus is considering logging in such circumstances demonstrates that decision-making principles concerning logging and the use of forest are not set out to reflect the best interests of society in the long term.

In a global context the need to preserve what little remains of the EU's undisturbed landscapes should need no discussion.

Compared to Developing Countries striving to protect rainforests alongside severe poverty, Finland stands to pay relatively little for protecting what remains of her old natural forests - and in the longer term protection will turn to economic benefit. The EU Commission last October gave 70 million Euros' worth of support to projects related to habitat restoration. The cost-benefit ratio of conserving Lapland's natural forests is many orders of magnitude better than this. It should also be noted that preservation of large natural forest areas within the EU remains possible only in northern Fennoscandia.

Esteemed Minister for Agriculture and Forestry: based on the above we appeal to you that the Finnish State and its own subsidiary Metsähallitus cease the initiated loggings in old natural forests of demonstrated values. Logging targets in Lapp state forests should be re-evaluated at the political level to take account of old natural forests' long term ecological and socio-economic importance, the local municipalities' other livelihoods, as well as Finland's responsibilities both morally and through international treaties we have signed.

We respectfully request you answer this open letter using public fora.

Signed by (in alphabetical order)

Bäck Jaana, docent
Eronen Jarmo, professor
Haila Yrjö, professor
Hakkarainen Harri, docent
Hanski Ilkka, academy professor
Hanski Ilpo K., docent
Heikkilä Raimo, research director
Hiedanpää Juha, researcher
Hukkinen Janne, professor
Hyytiäinen Kari, senior researcher
Jakovlev Jevgeni, researcher

Jokinen Mikko, researcher
Juutinen Artti, academy researcher
Kaitala Veijo, professor
Kalliola Risto, professor
Keto-Tokoi Petri, lector
Kokko Hanna, professor
Komonen Atte, researcher
Korhonen Kaisa, coordinator
Korpimäki Erkki, professor
Kotiaho Janne S., academy researcher
Kotiranta Heikki, special researcher
Kouki Jari, professor
Kumpula Anne, professor
Kuuluvainen Jari, professor
Kuuluvainen Timo, docent
Kyllönen Simo, researcher
Laakso Marjukka, researcher
Laaksonen Toni, researcher
Latva-Karjanmaa Tarja, researcher
Lehtinen Ari, professor
Lilja Saara, planning researcher
Lindholm Tapio, head specialist
Loukola Olli, professor
Lähde Erkki, professor emeritus
Martikainen Petri, docent
Merilä Juha, academy professor
Mäkipää Raisa, senior researcher
Mönkkönen Mikko, professor
Niemelä Jari, professor
Ollikainen Markku, professor
Orell Markku, professor
Ovaskainen Otso, academy researcher
Pennanen Juho, researcher
Pennanen Jukka, professor
Penttilä Reijo, senior researcher
Perämäki Martti, university lector
Puuronen Vesa, dosentti
Pykälä Juha, senior researcher
Rannikko Pertti, professor
Ranta Esa, professor
Renvall Pertti, docent
Ruohomäki Kai, docent
Ruuhijärvi Rauno, professor emeritus
Rytteri Teijo, researcher
Saarinen Jarkko, professor
Sajama Seppo, professor
Sarvala Jouko, professor
Selonen Vesa, researcher
Siiskonen Harri, professor

Simola Heikki, docent
Sippola Anna-Liisa, special researcher
Snellman Hanna, academy researcher
Sundström Liselotte, professor
Suvanto Leena, researcher
Suvantola Leila, researcher
Tahvonen Olli, professor
Tikka Päivi, researcher
Tikkanen Olli-Pekka, researcher
Toivonen Heikki, professor
Tukia Harri, senior researcher
Wallenius Tuomo, researcher
Vanha-Majamaa Ilkka, researcher
Varkonyi Gergely, special researcher
Virkkala Raimo, docent
Väre Henry, senior curator
Zetterberg Pentti, researcher

Translated by mr. Marcus Walsh, BirdLife