

MALAHVIA UPDATE 28 SEPTEMBER 2006

The Finnish state owned logging company Metsähallitus again started logging the Malahvia wilderness area in late March 2006 despite complaints and protests by the locals and NGOs. In September 2006, forestry machines are again logging in Malahvia.

Malahvia old-growth forest is situated in north-eastern Finland, by the Russian border. The forest area, some 4000 hectares, includes unditched bogs, streams, lakes and ponds. Rare and declining, wood-dependant plant and animal species are common in Malahvia. Some of the species that make their home in the Malahvia forest are already endangered and still more are about to become endangered. Malahvia is partly protected in the Natura 2000 -programme.

The dispute of the fate of Malahvia started already in the last century. Since then, negotiations and loggings have been on and off. In spring 2003, a little over 3000 people sent letters to the three biggest customers of Metsähallitus - Stora Enso, UPM and M-Real - asking the companies not to buy pulp and timber coming from this forest destruction. It helped for that year, but now the logging continues.

In March 2006, Metsähallitus justified the logging in the Natura 2000 -protection area by saying it is for scientific purposes, that the aim is to mimic the effects of natural disasters like storms and forest fires in a natural forest.

The NGOs and the head of governmental Friendship Park Research Centre, researcher Raimo Heikkilä, have said that this sounds like "scientific whaling": there is no such a storm that delivers the logs from the forest to a pulp mill. The already rare natural forests should be left outside logging, and the effects of forestry and also forest restoration should be researched in managed forests.

MARCH-APRIL 2006 Activists from the Finnish Nature League and Greenpeace demonstrated against the logging in Malahvia Natura 2000- area. Metsähallitus then called the police to guard the destruction of this valuable forest. Two activists were fined, and the logging continued. Logging took place inside of an area that has been classified by governmental research centre as ecologically valuable old-growth forest. StoraEnso Oulu mill, amongst other, bought pine and birch trees for pulping from Malahvia.

SEPTEMBER 2006 The Finnish state owned forestry enterprise Metsähallitus is now again logging the old-growth forests of Malahvia, in the north eastern part of Finland close to the Russian border. Now the logging takes place outside of Natura 2000-area, but still inside of the Malahvia- area that has been classified by governmental research centre as ecologically valuable old-growth forest.

According to research conducted by authorities working for the same government that is logging in this area, similar numbers of endangered species are found in only a few places in Finland.

Reports by the governmental environmental research centre go on to say that "...this is a forest site of major importance even on a national scale, whose diverse insect fauna and other endangered species will be saved only if no further fragmentation takes place."

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