METSÄHALLITUS

Parks & Wildlife Finland 2024

Management Effectiveness Evaluation of Finland's Protected Areas 2023

Summary of the Evaluation Report and Recommendations

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Migrating cranes (*Grus grus*) above the vast open mire of Torronsuo National Park. Photo: Vesa Nikkanen.

Management Effectiveness Evaluation of Finland's Protected Areas

Conservation agencies worldwide require transparent and comprehensive information to efficiently manage their national parks and nature reserves. The need to assess and enhance management effectiveness is also acknowledged in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. This framework aims to ensure that by 2030, at least 30% of terrestrial and inland water areas, as well as coastal and marine areas – especially those of significant importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions – are effectively conserved and managed. Regional and national biodiversity strategies play a pivotal role in achieving this ambitious goal.

Protected Area Management Effectiveness (PAME) Assessments are valuable tools for organising vast amounts of information and gaining fresh insights from external evaluators. In 2004, Finland became the world's first country to commission an independent review of the management effectiveness of its entire protected area network. The key recommendations then received have been meticulously implemented over the past two decades.

Metsähallitus Parks & Wildlife Finland (PWF) has now repeated this process. A comprehensive international assessment of the management effectiveness of Finland's protected areas was commissioned by PWF and carried out by an independent expert group in 2023. The commissioned PAME Evaluation Team comprised of well-known experts with diverse backgrounds, including international conservation consulting, peer conservation agency, tourism management and conservation governance, as well as national ministry and biodiversity research[1].

The Protected Area System in Finland

Finland's system of protected areas consists primarily of nature reserves established on state-owned land under the Nature Conservation Act, and of areas designated for nature conservation that have not yet been statutorily established as nature reserves, as well as wilderness reserves established under the Wilderness Act (Figure 1). These are complemented by numerous privately owned nature reserves (PPAs).

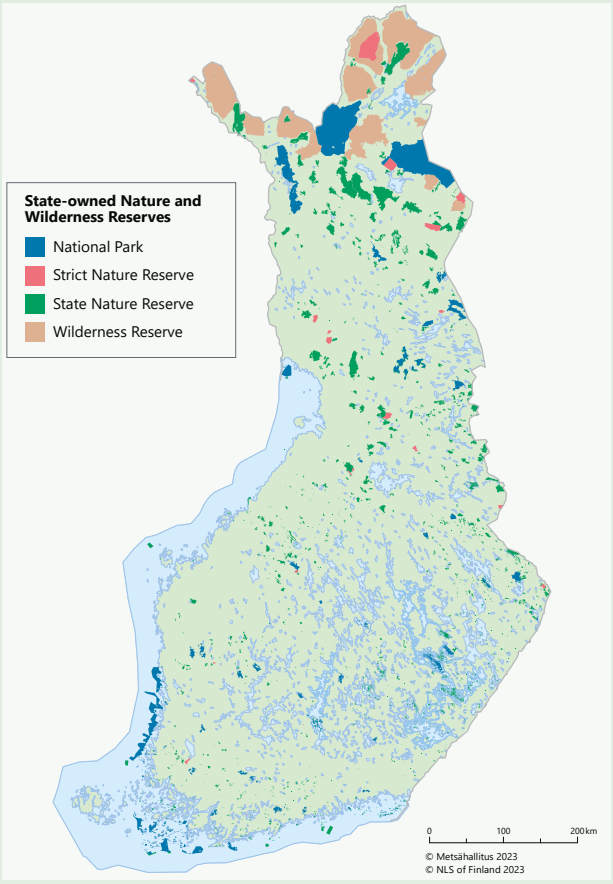

Figure 1. State-owned protected areas managed by Metsähallitus Parks & Wildlife Finland (2023).

[1] Evaluation Team – Sue Stolton (team leader) and Nigel Dudley, Equilibrium Research; Naira Dehmel, Kings's College London; Michael Hošek, EUROPARC Federation; Ben Ross, NatureScot and Yu-Fai Leung, North Carolina State University; Petri Ahlroth, Finland's Ministry of the Environment; Ari-Pekka Auvinen and Kari Lahti, Finnish Environment Institute

All the wilderness reserves and largest national parks are situated in northern Finland. National parks and strict nature reserves and other state nature reserves are found throughout the country. In southern Finland, sites are smaller and scattered.

The national designations also form the main part of the European Union's Natura 2000 network: 80% of the network overlaps with the national protected area network.

PWF directly manages over 90% of the total area of all Finnish protected areas and takes part in operational management of many PPAs. PWF also manages cultural heritage sites on state-owned lands, including buildings protected by legislation and ancient monuments.

PAME Assessment Aims

The Terms of Reference (ToR) were to carry out a comprehensive, nation-wide, agency-level evaluation of the state-owned protected area system operated by PWF. The basic aim of the PAME was to assess how:

- The protected area system is managed and governed by Parks & Wildlife Finland.
- The system is meeting obligations to the European Union Natura 2000 network and other international obligations.
- Effective are PWF conservation objectives.
- Effective the system is in protecting Finnish biological and cultural values.
- Well social objectives are met by providing:
  - visitor services in support of tourism and recreation opportunities.
  - infrastructure for regional sustainable development.

The current management of the network was evaluated and compared with the results of the previous evaluation carried out in 2004[2].

Methodology and Process

The 2004 assessment developed and implemented a methodology based on the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) protected area management effectiveness (PAME) framework (Figure 2), adapted for the particular conditions in Finland.

The framework defines the term management effectiveness as reflecting three main management themes:

- design issues relating to both individual sites and protected area systems;
- adequacy and appropriateness of management systems and processes; and
- delivery of protected area objectives including conservation of values.

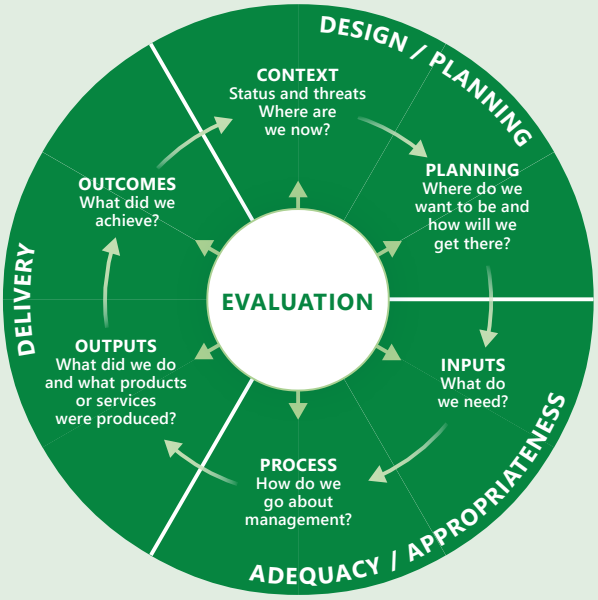

Figure 2. IUCN WCPA Framework on Protected Area Management Effectiveness (PAME).
Alternative text of the figure. The framework is pictured as a pie divided into three sectors reflecting three main management themes: 1) design/planning, 2) adequacy/appropriateness and 3) delivery. Evaluation is in the centre; it involves six elements to which arrows point from the centre, two in each sector. In sector 1 are context (Status and threats. Where are we now?) and planning (Where do we want to be and how will we get there?); sector 2 inputs (What do we need?) and process (How do we go about management?); sector 3 outputs (What did we do and what products or services were produced?) and outcomes (What did we achieve?). Arrows circulate from the one element to the next.

[2] Gilligan, B., Dudley, N., Fernandez de Tejada, A. & Toivonen, H. 2005: Management Effectiveness Evaluation of Finland's Protected Areas. – Nature Protection Publications of Metsähallitus. Series A147. 175 pp.

The assessment themes are operating context and the state of protected areas, planning, inputs/resources, process, outputs, and outcomes.

The methodology in 2023 followed the same format as in 2004 with updates to reflect the assessment ToR and the changes in protected area management and in global, European and national conservation goals, directives and legislation. Special attention was paid to, among other things, foresight and adaptation to climate change.

This assessment questionnaire formed the basis of the evaluation. PWF staff produced extensive thematic background material and answers to the network-level questions. In addition, an assessment based on the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) was carried out in five protected areas.

The evaluation also included a field trip, with visits to the assessed sites and meetings with representatives of Metsähallitus, organisations and stakeholders. Finally, results were reviewed by the Evaluation Team and used as the basis to develop recommendations for its report.

Progress since 2004

An expanding system:
Between 2004 and 2023 Finland's protected areas have expanded by almost 7,000 km^2. Total protected area coverage has grown to 14,3%.

Today PWF manages all state-owned protected areas:

- 41 National Parks
- 19 Strict Nature Reserves
- 1,100 other State Nature Reserves
- 3,000 sites designated in conservation programmes.
- 12 Wilderness Reserves
- 1 UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site.

The Natura 2000 network in Finland has also been modestly extended and currently covers 12.6% of the country's territory. Much of this network expansion is in marine and freshwater areas, where conservation is implemented by other means than establishing statutory nature reserves.

Salla National Park, established in 2022, became the 41st park in the national network. In the past decade, the national park concept has gained popularity among politicians and citizens alike. Photo: Harri Tarvainen.

An improving picture:

The Evaluation Team was pleased to see that many recommendations made in 2004 have been implemented. The overall picture is of improving management (Figure 3).

A comparison of the international team's assessment of management effectiveness using the *System-level evaluation of protected area management effectiveness for Parks & Wildlife Finland (PAME)*[3] developed in 2004 and updated in 2023 shows an overall improvement, with the percentage scores from across the whole evaluation rising from 69% to 75%. Almost all elements of the management focus, as expressed by the WCPA management effectiveness framework, have shown increases, the largest being in terms of outputs, e.g., actual work completed. This is a clear indication of the additional funding that in recent years has gone into the protected area network across Finland and the dedication of staff to deliver an effective conservation network.

The only static score is in relation to outcomes, which is a concern as it would have been hoped that the impact of conservation actions would have increased over the last 20 years. The scores particularly reflect that some threatened species populations are decreasing and some of the selected indicator species are outside acceptable ranges, which in turn means only some of the biological communities are likely to be able to sustain native biodiversity.

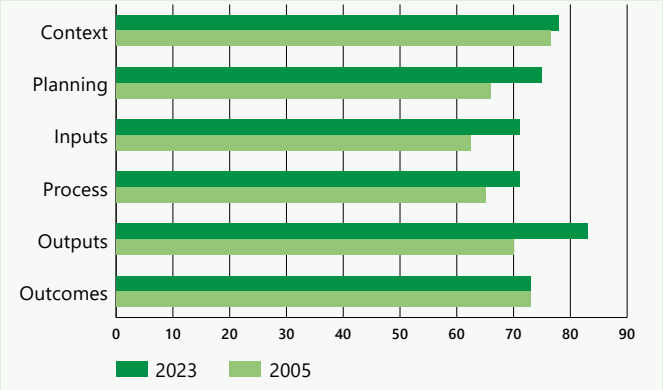

Figure 3. PAME assessment scores in 2004/2005 and 2023. Scores are represented as a percentage of the responses for all the questions in each category of the WCPA Framework (see Figure 2).

Habitat management as voluntary work in the Ekenäs and Hangö Archipelago and Pojo Bay Natura 2000 site. Photo: Katri Lehtola.

[3] Equilibrium Research. 2023. System-level evaluation of protected area management effectiveness for Parks & Wildlife Finland (PAME). Equilibrium Research, Bristol, UK.

Key Recommendations

The PAME assessment confirms that Finland has a world class protected area system. But it has significant challenges. Many species are threatened, threats are increasing due to e.g., climate change and resources available for management are stretched. The Evaluation Team gave a set of recommendations on how PWF might rethink its role as a conservation organisation and develop its management in a changing world. These recommendations are summarised by theme below and spelled out question by question in the complete report[4].

Vision and alignment: Strengthen the vision on biodiversity and emphasis in communications concerning protected areas. Develop strategies to address wicked problems such as the impacts of climate change, reindeer grazing and invasive alien species. Further develop prioritised habitat and species conservation programmes and indicators to monitor state of protected areas and nature values. Consider wider variety of protected area types to achieve international conservation objectives, with an emphasis on improving the network in southern Finland. Continue the adaptive development of PWF operations, taking care to involve staff. Explore opportunities to broaden the funding base and increase volunteering.

Photographing red-listed Fairy slipper (*Calypso bulbosa*) in Oulanka National Park. Visitors are attracted by the park's natural features and should understand their vulnerability. Photo: Ismo Pekkarinen.

International links: Strengthen the link between PWF activities and global/regional goals and reporting on the role of protected areas against these goals. Participate actively in the development of reporting methods, e.g. concerning protected area management effectiveness.

Collaboration and integration: Develop links with research institutions and systematically ensure the use of new research results to improve the management of protected areas. Strengthen focus on nature and ecosystems in environmental education. Develop cooperation and participation with communities operating in the vicinity of protected areas.

Management: Ensure strategic operational steering and staff support in a changing operating environment. Streamline protected area planning processes, aiming for an adaptive approach. Develop strategies for integrating climate issues into management planning at site and network level. In planning and communication, place more emphasis on the ecosystem services and societal benefits provided by protected areas. Develop tourism cooperation and sustainability management.

Data and management links: Continue to develop internal data systems and knowledge-based management, as well as interactive external web-based systems, involving staff and customers. Develop a holistic approach to reporting on the state of protected areas. Integrate the monitoring of biodiversity in protected areas more closely into the broader long-term monitoring framework in Finland.

Public and key stakeholder engagement: Develop procedures to strengthen the consultation, participation and custodianship of local communities in protected areas. Monitor the expectations of visitors to protected areas, in order to maintain satisfaction and anticipate changing pressures. Translate management principles into visitor and resource management actions on the ground and communicate them effectively.

[4] Stolton, S., Ahlroth, P., Auvinen, A-P., Dehmel, N., Dudley, N., Hošek, M., Lahti, K., Ross, B., Leung, Y-F. 2024. Management Effectiveness Evaluation of Finland's Protected Areas 2023. Nature Protection Publications of Metsähallitus. Series A250. 196 pp. <julkaisut.metsa.fi/en/publication/management-effectiveness-evaluation-of-finlands-protected-areas-2023>.