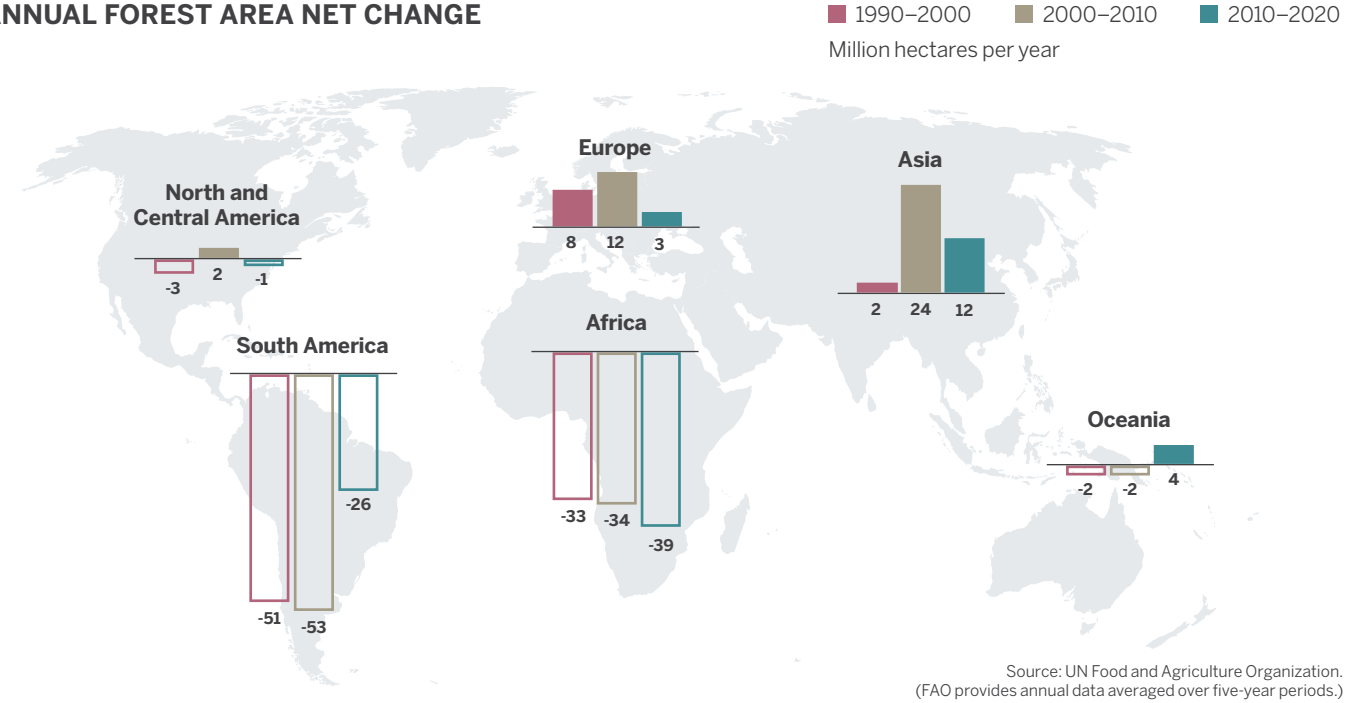
Facts about Nordic forests

– what you should know about forestry in Finland and Sweden

The ability of trees to absorb CO_2 makes forests an important carbon sink; they are also a carbon storage and valuable ecosystems, providing a home for many species, both flora and fauna. Forests also offer great recreational value. The majority of forests in Finland and Sweden have been owned by families for generations. Forests differ depending on where they are located; most Finnish and Swedish forests are situated in the boreal zone and experience long winters and short summers. There is plenty of water available and the forests – which cover 75% and 70% of the land area of Finland[1] and Sweden[2] respectively – grow without the need for irrigation.

ANNUAL FOREST AREA NET CHANGE



Source: UN Food and Agriculture Organization.
(FAO provides annual data averaged over five-year periods.)

HOW SERIOUS A PROBLEM IS DEFORESTATION?

Deforestation is a serious problem happening in some parts of the world, with negative impact on climate, ecosystems and livelihoods. Almost 90% of deforestation worldwide is due to agricultural expansion. Conversion to cropland dominates forest loss in Africa and Asia whereas in South America almost three quarters of deforestation is due to livestock grazing[3].

However, deforestation is regional, and in Europe, forest area is growing. In 2021, forests covered 39% of the EU land area, which represents an increase of about 8 million hectares or 5.3% since 2000[4].

"On average, an estimated 66% of the net annual increment of wood in EU forests was logged in 2022[4]."

1) Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland
2) Swedish Forest Agency
3) Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
4) Eurostat

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HOW IS THE BIODIVERSITY TAKEN CARE OF IN NORDIC FORESTS?

Biodiversity loss is a global issue, and Nordic countries are no exception.

Plants, fungi, animals, and microorganisms all have vital roles to play in a forest ecosystem, and it's important to operate in a way that does not affect the balance between them. In Nordic forests, industry and forest owners pay special attention to biodiversity for instance by leaving retention trees, biodiversity stumps and buffer zones towards waters, and preserving standing or fallen decaying trees. Decaying wood provides homes for many different species.

The most valuable forest sites are left as they are for conservation. To protect the biodiversity of Finnish forests, both protected areas and natural management of forests are needed.[6]

Maintenance and enhancement of biological diversity of forests are an integral element of the Finnish forest policy, legislation and practices. In Finland, certification systems (PEFC, FSC®) developed in participatory processes, which are independent of any public authorities, are widely used on a voluntary basis to ensure the sustainability of forest management[5].

In Nordic countries commercial forests are mainly semi-natural, meaning that only native tree species are used and wood production is integrated into natural ecosystems without land-use conversion. Mixed forests – coniferous and broad-leaved species growing in the same area – are becoming more common as they have been shown to be an effective way to maintain biodiversity. They are also considered to be more resistant to damage caused by climate change.

DOES CUTTING DOWN TREES DECREASE THE CARBON SINK?

Good forest management practices play a key role in ensuring that forests grow more than they are harvested and that forests remain a carbon sink. Trees bind carbon and help mitigate climate change. It is important to get forests growing again as quickly as possible after regeneration felling. Legislation in Finland and Sweden requires that forests are regenerated.

The carbon sinks in Finland's forests are assessed annually. A healthy growing forest can act as a carbon sink, in which the amount of carbon stored in a growing tree increases while the forest serves as a resource-efficient source of renewable raw material for products that people around the world can utilize in their daily lives.

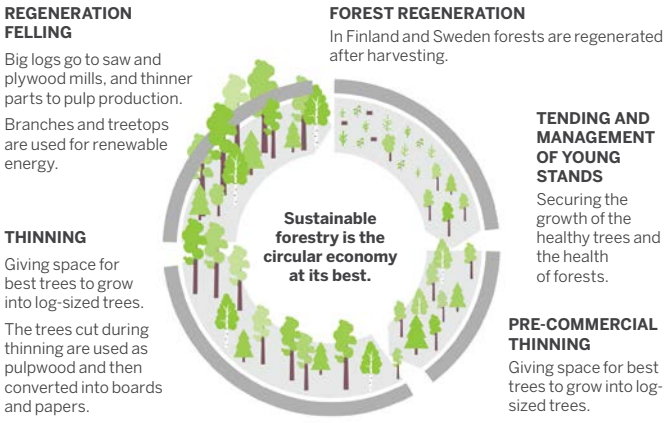
HOW MUCH OF THE FORESTS IN FINLAND AND SWEDEN ARE PROTECTED?

13% of the total forest area in Finland is protected or in restricted use whereas under strict conservation is 10% of the total forest area. It is a large share in international comparison[5].

In Sweden nine percent of the forest area is formally protected[6].

HOW DOES CERTIFICATION SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT?

Forest certifications are voluntary accreditations that support the wellbeing of forests and confirm the legality of wood's origin. The most common forest certification schemes are PEFC and FSC®, both of which help conserve biodiversity and preserve the valuable habitats and biotopes that are typical of natural forests. Forest certification ensures good conditions for the people working in forests and allows the forests to continue to be used for recreational purposes. It also safeguards the rights of indigenous people in northern parts of Finland and Sweden.



Sustainable forestry ensures that:

- wood has been sourced legally
- wood is traceable and its supply chain is transparent
- forests grow more than they are used
- biodiversity is protected
- human rights are respected

5) Biodiversity and protection – Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland
6) Swedish Forest Agency

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