



State of semi-natural grasslands in Estonia

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Semi-natural grasslands in Estonia

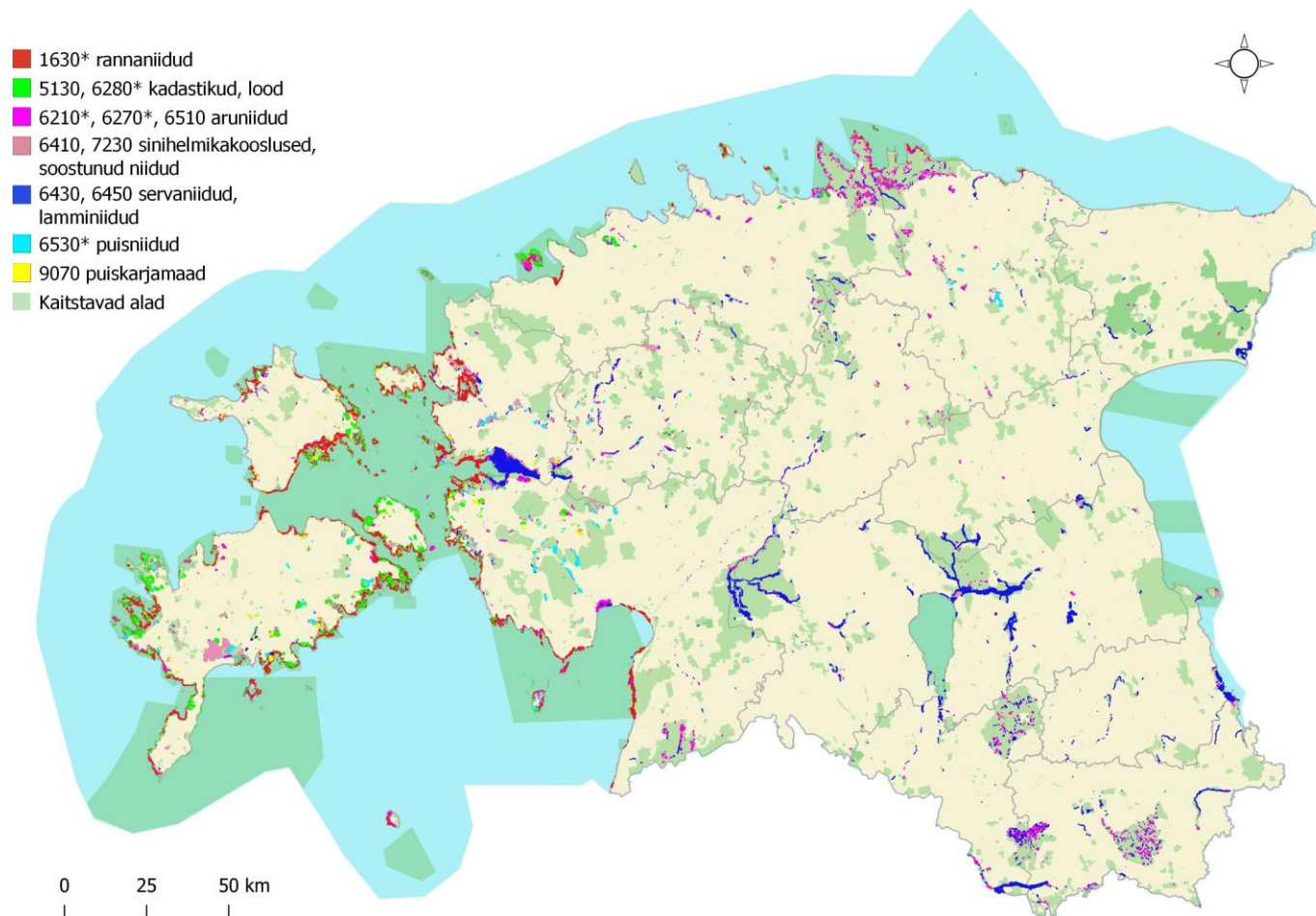
- Video overview of different habitats - ([youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com))
- Semi-natural grasslands in Estonia are grasslands that have traditionally been used as natural pastures or haylands, they have not been plowed or fertilized, and no seeds of cultivated plants have been sown to them at the known time.
- Heritage meadows.





Semi-natural grasslands in protected areas

- At least 60 000 ha of semi-natural communities are preserved in protected areas.
- Based on an ecological assessment, it is necessary to preserve at least 66 000-86 000 ha of semi-natural grassland **in protected areas**, in order to ensure the survival of 90-100% of the habitats of protected species associated with these areas.
- Currently under management 42 400 ha. National target for 2027 is 50 000 ha to manage.





Overview of Report under Article 17 of the Habitats Directive (12 habitats)

- Only four habitat types are in a favorable condition
- Wooded meadows and alkaline fens are in unfavorable condition.
- Investments in habitat restoration and maintenance can be seen as a positive trend in coastal meadows and alvars.
- The main reason for the unfavorable condition is the cessation of meadow management.

Table 1. Estimates of the status of habitats, area, structure and functions and future prospects for the reporting period 2013–2018 and the overall assessment obtained based on them together with the latest [trend](#)



Habitat type	Code	Distribution on area	Surface area	Structure	The future	Overall assessment	Trend
Coastal meadow	1630*	FV	FV	U1	FV	U1	↑
Juniper communities	5130	FV	FV	FV	FV	FV	→
Dry meadow on calcareous soil	6210	FV	FV	U1	U1	U1	→
Fennoscandian lowland species-rich dry to mesic grasslands	6270*	FV	FV	U1	U1	U1	→
Alvar	6280*	FV	FV	U1	FV	U1	↑
Molinia meadows	6410	FV	FV	FV	FV	FV	→
species-rich tall herb communities on rich soils	6430	FV	FV	FV	FV	FV	→
Flooded meadow	6450	FV	FV	U1	U1	U1	↓
Lowland hay meadows	6510	FV	FV	FV	FV	FV	→
Wooded meadow	6530*	U1	U1	U2	U2	U2	?
Alkaline fens	7230	FV	U1	U1	U2	U2	↓
Wooded pastures	9070	FV	FV	U1	U1	U1	↑

FV = favorable

U1 = insufficient

U2 = bad

An asterisk (*) indicates priority habitat types for protection of which the EU has a special responsibility.



Action Plan for Semi-natural grasslands

Current Action Plan for Semi-natural grassland helps to implement the goals set

- in EU directives, including the Habitats and Birds Directive
- Estonian Environmental Strategy until 2030 (ensuring the existence of habitats and communities necessary for the preservation of viable populations of species and preserving cohesive landscapes)
- Natura Financing Action Plan 2021-2027
- EU Strategic Plan for the Common Agricultural Policy 2021-2027 (increasing the biodiversity of the agricultural landscape)

The action plan for semi-natural grassland (for 12 habitats) sets goals for the preservation and restoration, provides an overview of the current situation and risk factors and describes activities to achieve the goals until 2027.



Action Plan for Semi-natural grasslands

Objectives until 2027

- increased awareness of the values and maintenance of meadows
- effective protection and improved connectivity of semi-natural grasslands
- consistent management and improved quality of maintenance
- organized data and databases

Implementation is effective

- if the condition of the meadow habitats has not deteriorated and the **trends of the habitat condition are positive**
- **50,000 hectares of semi-natural grassland are under maintenance, and the circle of managers and landowners has expanded**
- **areas with a high restoration value have been restored, which has improved the landscape connectivity** of the semi-natural grassland
- the data set of the semi-natural grassland has been organized and united habitat database has been created



Implementation and funding of Action Plan

Management

- Under Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture
- Implemented by Environmental Board + Payment Agency
- Funding: CAP, technical support
- Budget: 42 mil eur (per period)

Restoration

- Under Ministry of Climate
- Implemented by Environmental Board (private lands), State Forest Management Center (state lands)
- Funding: LIFE projects, state budget, Cohesion Fund
- Budget: 10 mil eur (per period)





Developments, challenges and successes

Semi-natural subsidy scheme outside nationally protected areas

- Subsidy for natural objects protected at the local government level
- Subsidy for seminatural grasslands outside protected areas
- To improve connectivity between protected areas
- Funding from CAP





Developments, challenges and successes

Successes

- Strong circle of managers (800), including active farmers who participate in discussions regarding development of the field
- Recognition event for semi-natural grassland managers (every second year)
- Advise system for new landowners
- Regular information letter for 6000 landowners (land over 5 ha)
- Web application for rental interest – landowners and managers both can mark their interest
- Funding LIFE-IP ForEst&FarmLand project





Developments, challenges and successes

Challenges

- Until 2023 autumn restoration from national subsidy scheme → procurements (all EU funded project sites)
- Environmental Board arranged first procurement, high administrative work
- National subsidy restoration scheme needs reforming

- Flexible management subsidy scheme is harder for Environmental Board to implement
- Unmanaged are fragmented → lack of large areas for management
- Landowners don't give permission to restore, ca 50% of semi-natural grassland privately owned
- Focus on climate targets → grassland restoration vs afforestation





Future views

- **Renewing of Semi-natural grassland Action Plan** in LIFE-IP ForEst&FarmLand project (2024-2027)
- **EU restoration law and national restoration plan – concrete plan for semi-natural grasslands habitats as well**
- **National Climate law** – to add as much biodiversity elements and actions to support climate targets. Climate targets cannot harm or contradict biodiversity targets
- **New research about carbon stock** in grassland soil – the role of semi-natural grasslands is important. The soil carbon stock in natural meadows is comparable to the soil carbon stock in the forest. Carbon stock is higher in grazed grasslands than in abandoned ones





More information

- Action Plan for Semi-natural grasslands
- Habitat based management plans
- Short and long videos of semi-natural grasslands

[Environmental Board - Maintenance of semi-natural grasslands](#)

- LIFE IP ForEst&FarmLand

[Homepage | Loodusrikas Eesti](#)

- 26-30 August 2024 European Conference on Ecological Restoration in Tartu

[SERE Conference 2024](#)

Photos: Kaidi Tingas, Heikki Aavent, Merike Linnamägi, Kristiina Jürisoo, Leelo Kukkk, Vaido Otsar