



The Situation of the Swedish Forest

The forest ecosystems in Sweden are being depleted. There is a consensus among Sweden's leading nature conservation scientists that the production-oriented forestry of today is threatening the forest biodiversity. Unprotected old-growth forests are disappearing one after one, leaving clear-cuts and uniform tree plantations behind. Indeed, the Swedish forest landscape has been altered dramatically by the timber industry.

Over half of the land area in Sweden is covered by forests. However, many of these "forests" consist of species-poor tree plantations. Nearly all forests in Sweden have been affected by forestry in some way. The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency and Swedish Forest Agency estimate that only about 8% of the Swedish productive forest land consists of high conservation value forests. A majority of Swedish forests are young and not yet ready to be felled from a commercial point of view. Timber companies are, therefore, turning to the remaining, unprotected high conservation value forests.

More than 1,800 forest and tree living plant and animal species in Sweden are red-listed, that is near-threatened or endangered, mostly due to habitat destruction. Many of these species are dependent on habitats that have old trees, standing and lying dead wood and deciduous trees. Tree plantations and fragmented forest landscapes cannot support these threatened species in the long run and there is a severe extinction debt. According to leading scientists, 20% of the productive forest land needs to be protected in order to safeguard the biodiversity in the long run. In 2017, only about 4% of the productive forest land is formally protected as national parks, nature reserves, or the like.

Sweden has signed the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), committing to significantly halt the current loss of forest biodiversity by 2020. The Swedish environmental quality objective, "Sustainable forests", states that the biological diversity must be safeguarded, by year 2020. Due to lacking political will, the goal is to formally protect a total of 5% productive forest land by 2020. This is clearly insufficient and violates the commitments under the CBD Aichi-Target 11, which says that at least 17% of terrestrial areas should be conserved.

In 2013, more than 200,000 hectares of productive forests were felled while only 10,000 hectares of productive forests were formally protected. The Swedish Forestry Act states, that the production and environmental objectives should be of equal importance. Reality is far from this. In 2010, 37% of the fellings did not comply with the environmental requirements of the Act and there are no sanctions when this law is violated. The government promotes voluntary protection measures, but there are no guarantees regarding the biodiversity values, functionality and long-sightedness of these measures.

Forest and Climate

The Swedish government and the timber industry argue for an increased forest production using climate-mitigation as a pretext. A "bio-economy" is promoted in order to legitimize more intensive forest land management. In theory, fossil-fuel derived energy and products can be replaced by 'bio-renewables'. However, large volumes of greenhouse gases are released from soil, especially on peat land, when forests are clear-cut. In general, there is a pattern of decreasing carbon pools in tree plantations as compared to forests. Old-growth forests aged up to 800 years can still continue to function as carbon sinks and by protecting older forest ecosystems from land-use change, greenhouse gas emissions can be avoided.

Climate change implies increased stress and vulnerability for the forest species. Intact forest landscapes and natural forests resist and recover better from fires, storms, insect outbreaks and other types of climate impacts, compared to fragmented areas and tree plantations. These areas give the

trees, plants and animals better possibilities to migrate, adapt and survive in a climate that is changing. Researchers question whether it is possible to design a forest management strategy that cools the climate and, at the same time, sustains wood production and other ecosystem services.

What is needed?

A climate, biodiversity and ecosystem adjusted forest policy, including stringent conservation strategies. The overall goal must be socio-ecological economics and policies that operate within the planetary boundaries. All policies need to be tested against this goal before implementation.

- 1) Stop the global destruction and felling of primary and natural forests. Protect these forests.
- 2) Use harvesting methods that minimize the release of greenhouse gases from soil. Support the use of nature-oriented and continuous cover forestry.
- 3) Promote natural regeneration and favor mixed forests with a greater proportion of deciduous trees.
- 4) Discontinue the use of soil scarification, drainage, fertilizers, exotic tree species and pesticides.
- 5) Prolong the rotation period to sequester more carbon.
- 6) Produce less short-lived forest products since these require a lot of energy to produce and release carbon to the atmosphere rapidly. Prioritize long-lived products instead.
- 7) Reduce consumption of energy as well as paper, forest products and other natural resources.

Read more about the climate and the forest here: <http://klimatetochskogen.nu/en/>

Protect the Forest

The non-profit organization Protect the Forest was established in 2009 by people from the whole country, committed to forest issues, because of the critical situation of the forest and the threats against biodiversity. We work to:

- 1) Protect Sweden's old-growth forests and other forests with high conservation values.
- 2) Reform the forestry into a nature-oriented multiple-use, which includes local livelihoods and sustainable usages of natural resources, recreation and ecotourism.
- 3) Oppose present forest management methods since they do not live up to the portal paragraph of the Swedish Forestry Act, which states that the environmental objective and the production objectives should be of equal importance.

Read more about the organization here: <http://www.skyddaskogen.se/en>

The forest needs your support!

Become a member in Protect the Forest: 100 SEK/year
(write your name, address and e-mail address).

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