

The Swedish FSC certified forestry model

A case study from Rättvik municipality in Dalarna County



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Report made by

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Front page pictures

The pictures on the front page are showing a so called “mosaic logging” conducted by the forest company Sveaskog. The old silver coloured dead pine tree (behind the rock) has been standing as a dead tree for more than 250 years, charred on the surface by a large forest fire in 1888. It was surrounded by an old-growth forest which was thinned in the end of the 1980s, but it was never clearcut and therefore the forest still harboured a large portion of biodiversity. But in 2017 the forest was clearcut for the first time ever and the old dead silver coloured pine tree is now no longer surrounded by an old-growth forest. The biodiversity in the forest is destroyed and the clear-cut emits greenhouse gases. This is the reality in the so called environmentally friendly Swedish forestry model.

Sweden's so-called environmentally certified forestry

In 2013, the report Ore Skogsrike was published, where the local Swedish Society for Nature Conservation in Rättvik pointed out a large number of different oldgrowth forests worth protecting in the landscape area called Ore Skogsrike (Ore Forest Kingdom, translated into English).¹

This area is located in Ore parish, north of Furudal in Rättvik municipality, Dalarna County. Within this designated landscape the state-owned forest company Sveaskog owns large areas of forest land. The report stated that within this landscape area, the potential was big to create a functional forest ecosystem on a landscape level by preserving all designated forest areas with high conservation values. Thereby green infrastructure would be created and build a vibrant forest landscape.² In this way we could achieve both national environmental objectives and international environmental agreements in the borders of the Ore Forest Kingdom.³⁴⁵ This landscape could be used as a model to illustrate a forest landscape where environmental objectives and international environmental commitments are achieved on a local and regional level.

The report was sent to Sveaskog, Bergvik skog AB (now Stora Enso), the Swedish Forest Agency, the County Administrative Board, Rättvik municipality and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency. We were hoping that everyone would stand behind this fantastic opportunity to finally achieve all the environmental objectives concerning forest ecology and biodiversity. During the year 2017, the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation in Rättvik made field visits to follow up on how the work had developed.⁶ Sadly, it turned out that many negative things had happened. The County Administrative Board had made an inventory of designated forests on Bergvik skog AB's forest land, but only two new nature reserves have been created. On the other hand, several hundred hectares of natural old-growth forests that were pointed out as high conservation value forests worthy of protection in the report from 2013 had been harvested or managed, causing a negative impact. It seemed like our original report had been thrown in the trash bin by the different companies and governmental agencies that we sent it to.

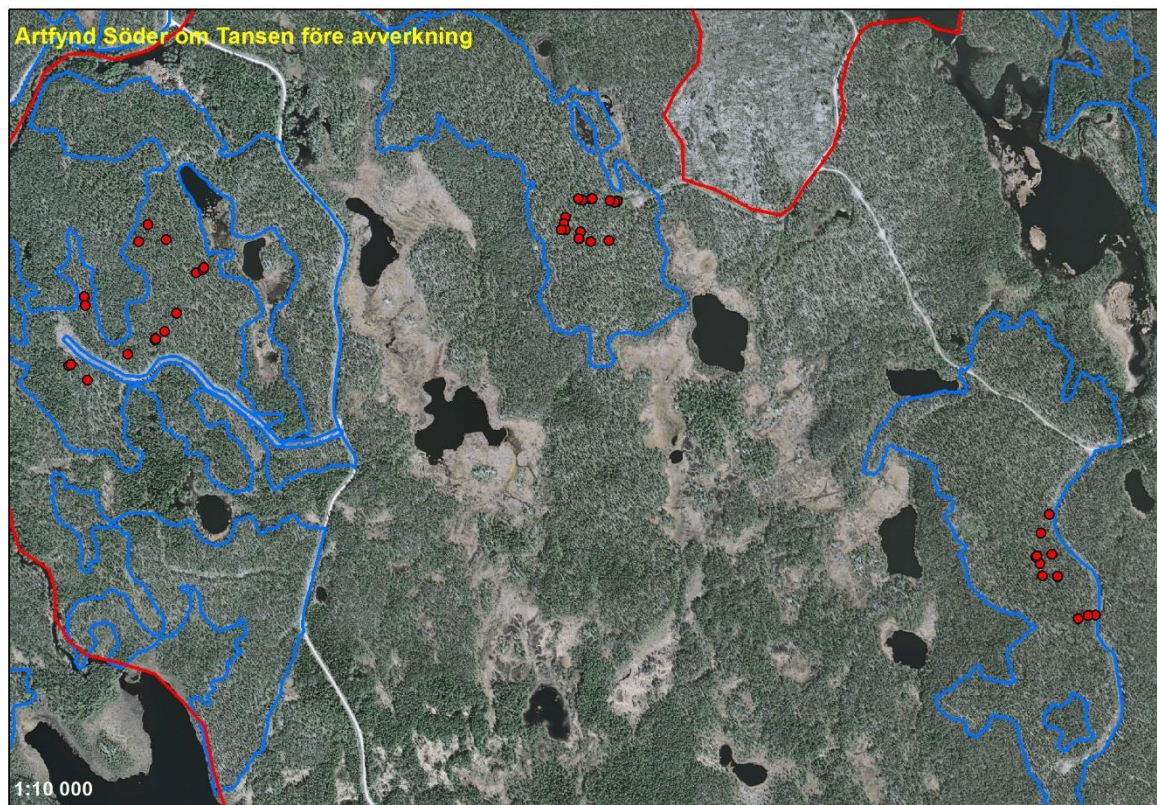
For example, Mellanskog (a forest owner association company) conducted thinning in one of the nicest natural old-growth pine forests in the area, called Filingsåsen. This had major negative effects on species diversity. In the area that Mellanskog thinned, there were large quantities of the red-listed lichen species *Evernia divaricata* (VU) and even findings of one of Sweden's and Europe's most rare and threatened species of polypore *Gloeophyllum carbonarium* (EN). The forest thinning is believed to be a so-called "backward nature conservation-thinning", which has been the way for

Mellanskog and other forest companies to destroy high conservation values in oldgrowth natural forests.⁷ In order to conduct thinning the forest owner or forest company does not have to fill in a notification form for forest management and send it to the Forest Agency before thinning, as they need to do before doing forest felling. Mellanskog gave advice and made an agreement with the forest owner to do thinning in the old-growth forest in order to destroy the conservation values in it. In this way, the risk that the forest would be designated as a woodland key habitat by the Swedish Forest Agency is prevented. Also, the Forest Agency very seldom visits the forest notified for felling in the field. However, according to both forest certification systems PEFC and FSC, forest companies must have the knowledge to assess a forest's biological values in order to prevent that they are cut down.⁸⁹ This applies whether the forest is a registered or unknown woodland key habitat.

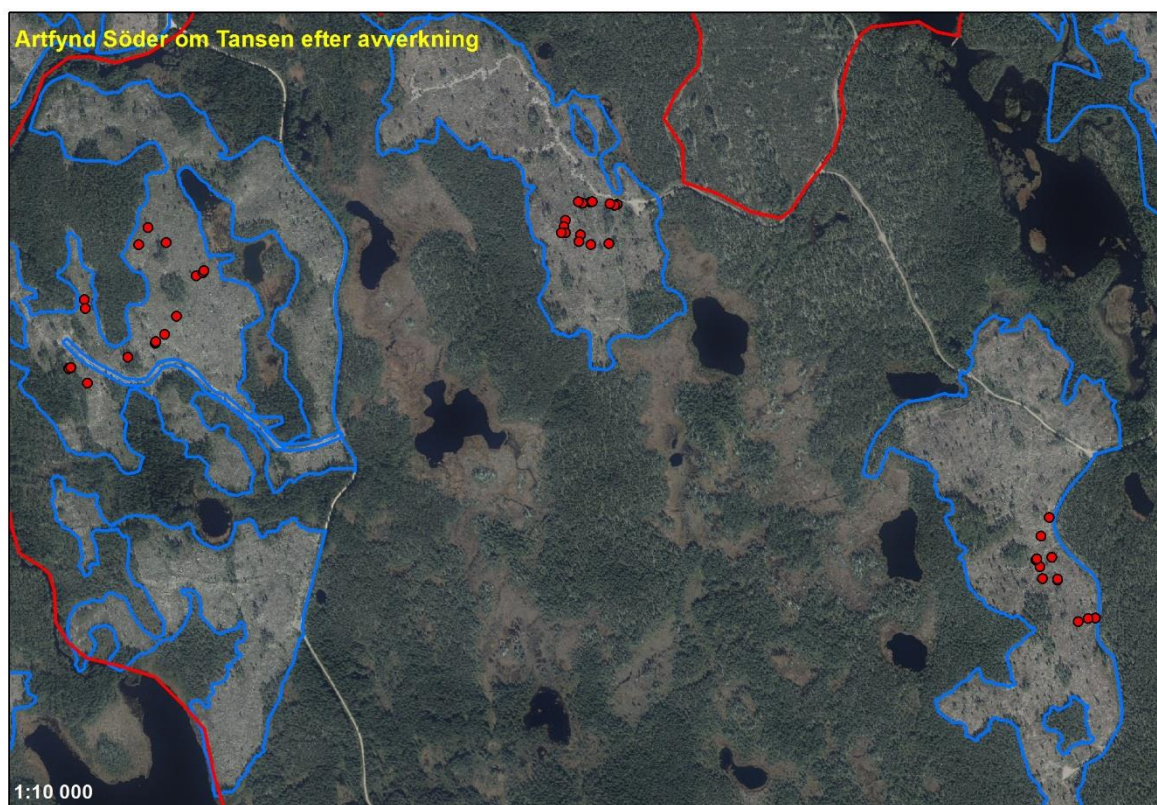
The same also applies to the so-called sector responsibility (an agreement concerning consideration for the environment) where the forest industry and forest owners are obliged to safeguard high conservation value forests on a voluntary basis.¹⁰ In the case of Filingsåsen, where Mellanskog did a thinning of an old-growth forest with high conservation values, the company showed an incredibly poor level of knowledge and understanding regarding the assessment of the forest's biological values. The forest harbored, red-listed species and valuable structures such as dead wood, old trees and natural pine stumps charred by the last forest fire. But Mellanskog harvested the forest (by thinning), just to minimize the risk that the forest would be designated as a woodland key habitat. This behavior does not comply with the environmental criteria of the forest certification systems.

Sveaskog, the state-owned forest company, has been among the worst of them all. They have over the years since the report Ore Skogsrike came out (2013) continued its crusade against the biodiversity of natural forests. A new method of harvesting forest has been introduced; they call it mosaic logging. Thereby, Sveaskog can circumvent existing safeguards and continue to cut down forests with high conservation values by using more so-called sustainable words and arguments. They claim that mosaic logging will increase the biodiversity and conservation values in the forest instead of just letting the forest remain as a forest. However, mosaic logging is nothing more than a clear-cut with a bit more retention trees and groups of trees left as consideration areas on the clear-cut. It is a catastrophe for the forest ecosystem. Within the designated forest areas with high conservation values in Ore Forest kingdom, hundreds of hectares have been clearcut or logged with mosaic logging methods by Sveaskog. Even though they were aware of the high biological values, presented in our report from 2013. Swedish governments (governed by right or left winged parties) has always had a good reputation when it comes to politics regarding environment and climate but in reality; it turns out that the state-owned forest companies and forest owners are among the worst saboteurs when it comes to achieving national environmental goals and international environmental commitments. The clear-felling forestry has been used for decades in the Swedish forest landscape and by the vast majority of forest companies and forest owners. About 200 000 hectares have been clear-cut every single year. In the following pages you will find aerial photos before and after logging which are examples of forest devastation caused by the Swedish forestry model. The red lines demarcate areas with old-growth forests, blue lines outline planned forest logging and red dots are findings of indicator species and red-listed species in the forest.

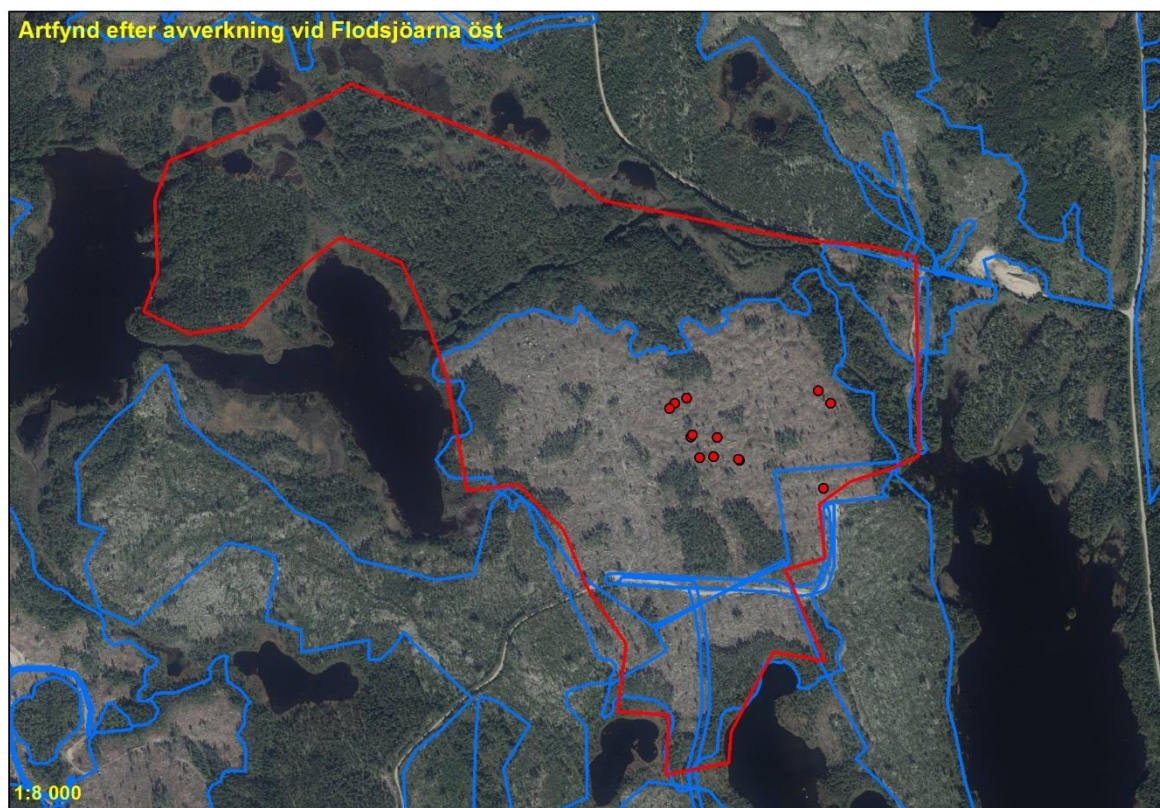
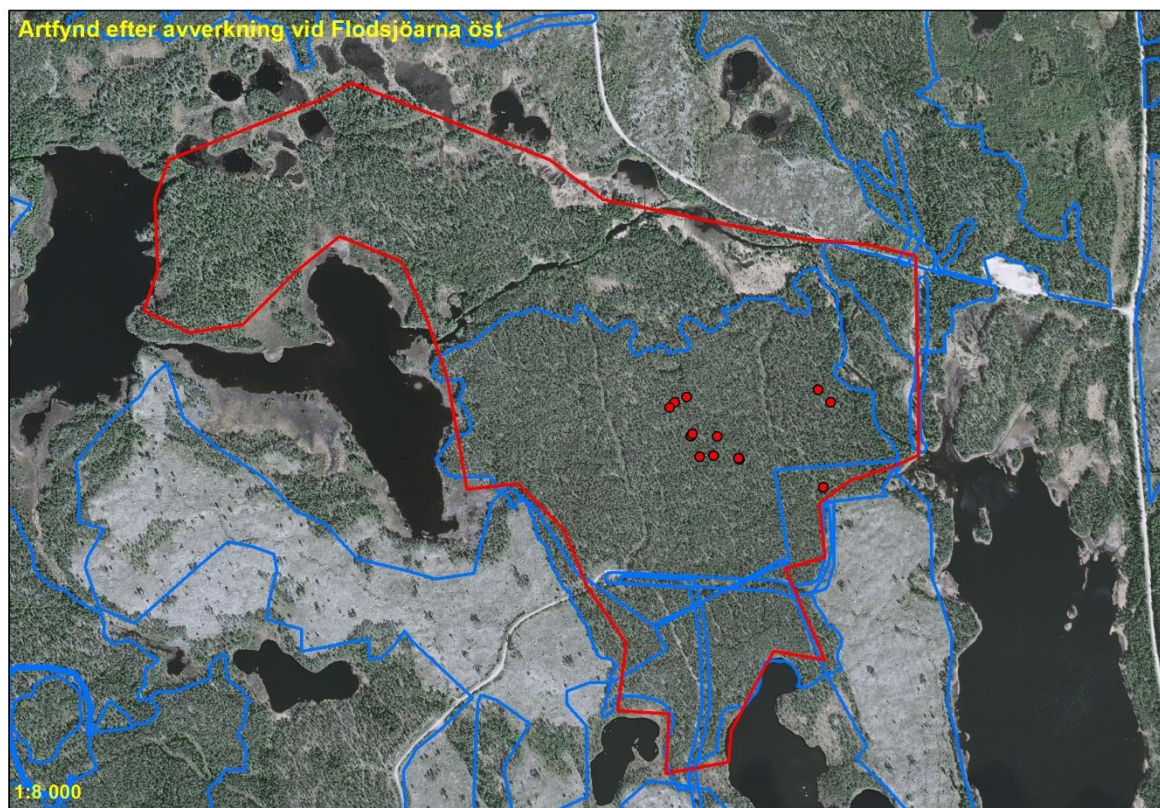
Sveaskog clear-cut forestry at the lake Tansen



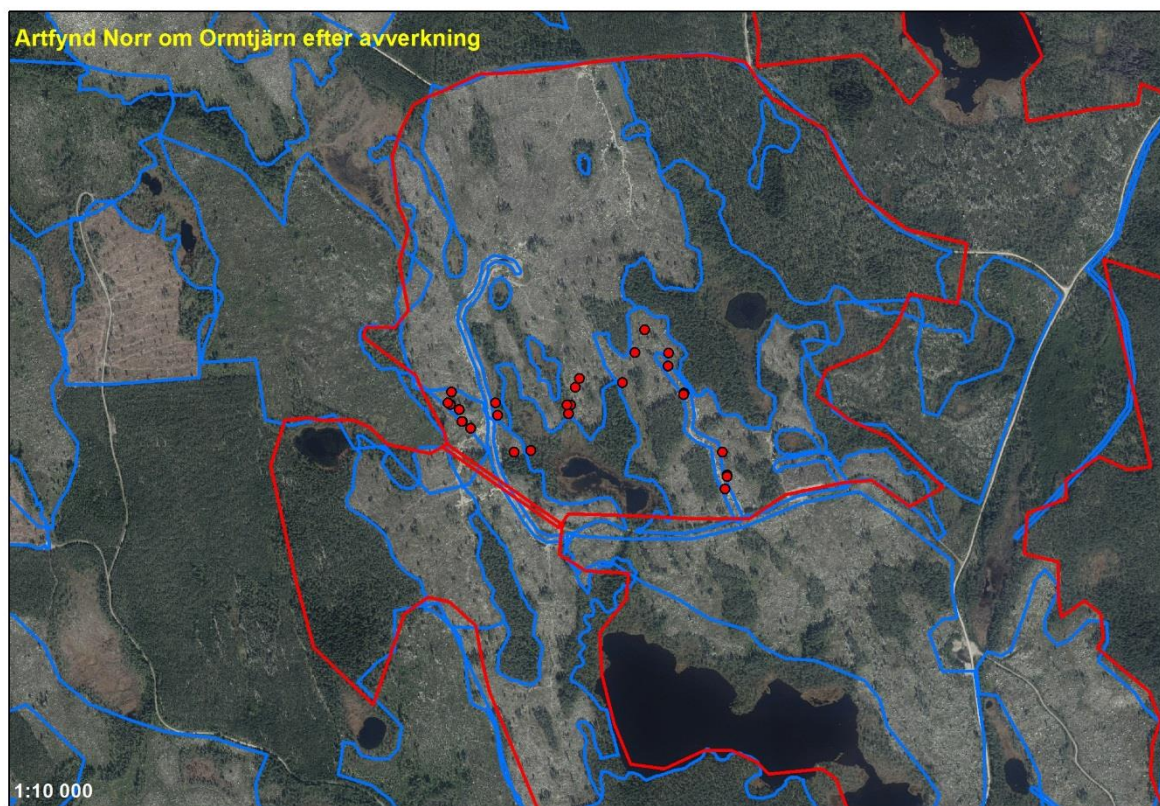
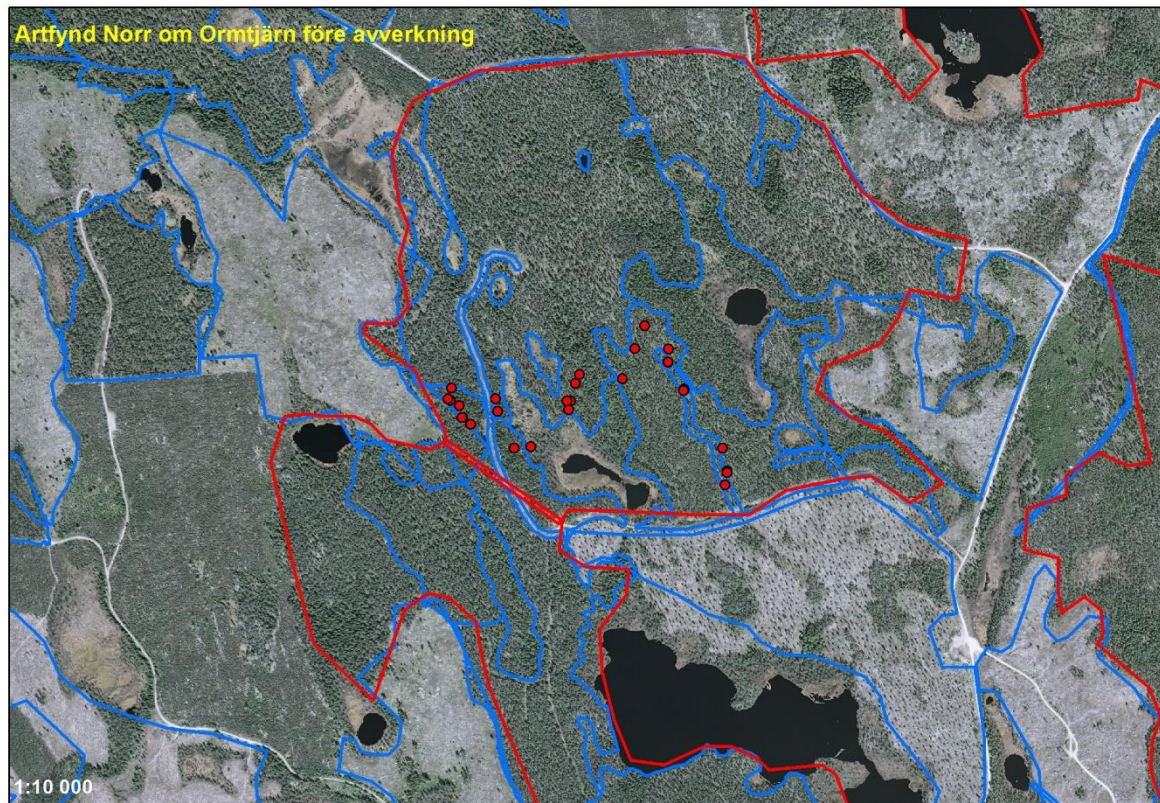
Blue lines demarcate notifications for forest felling. Red dots are findings of indicator species and red-listed species. These are all old-growth forests that were clearcut despite high conservation values.



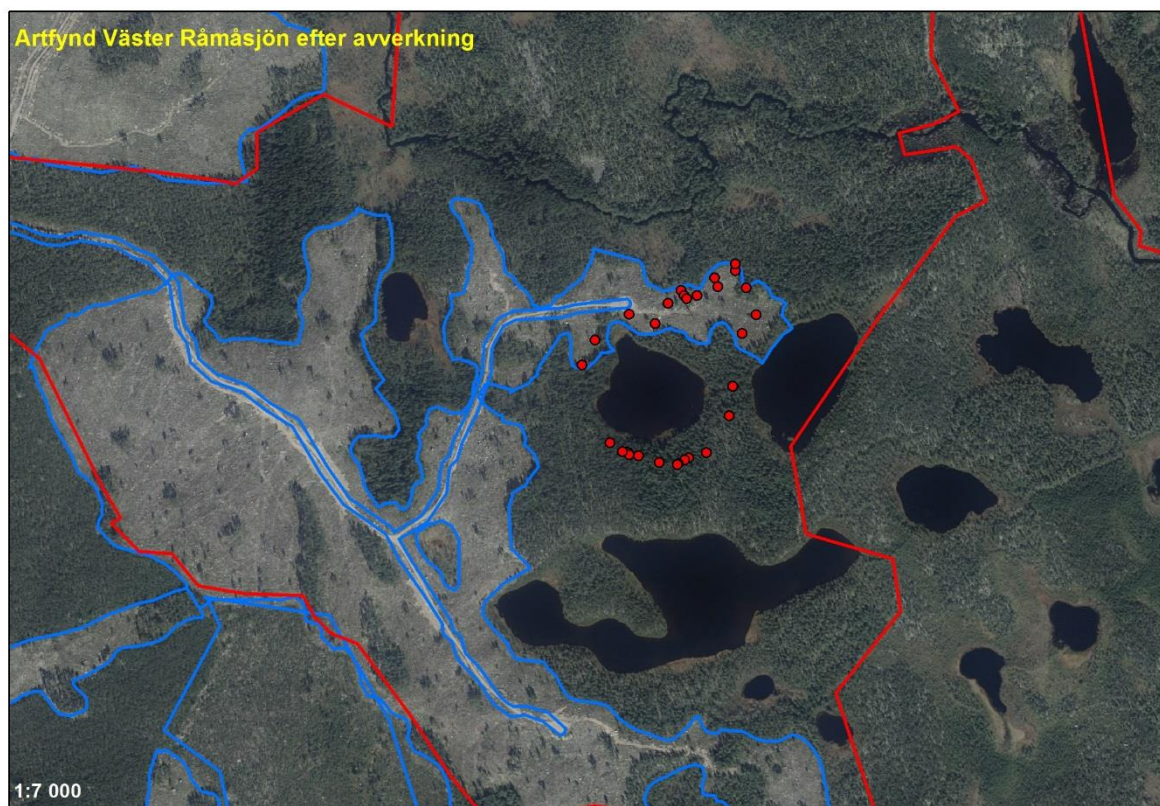
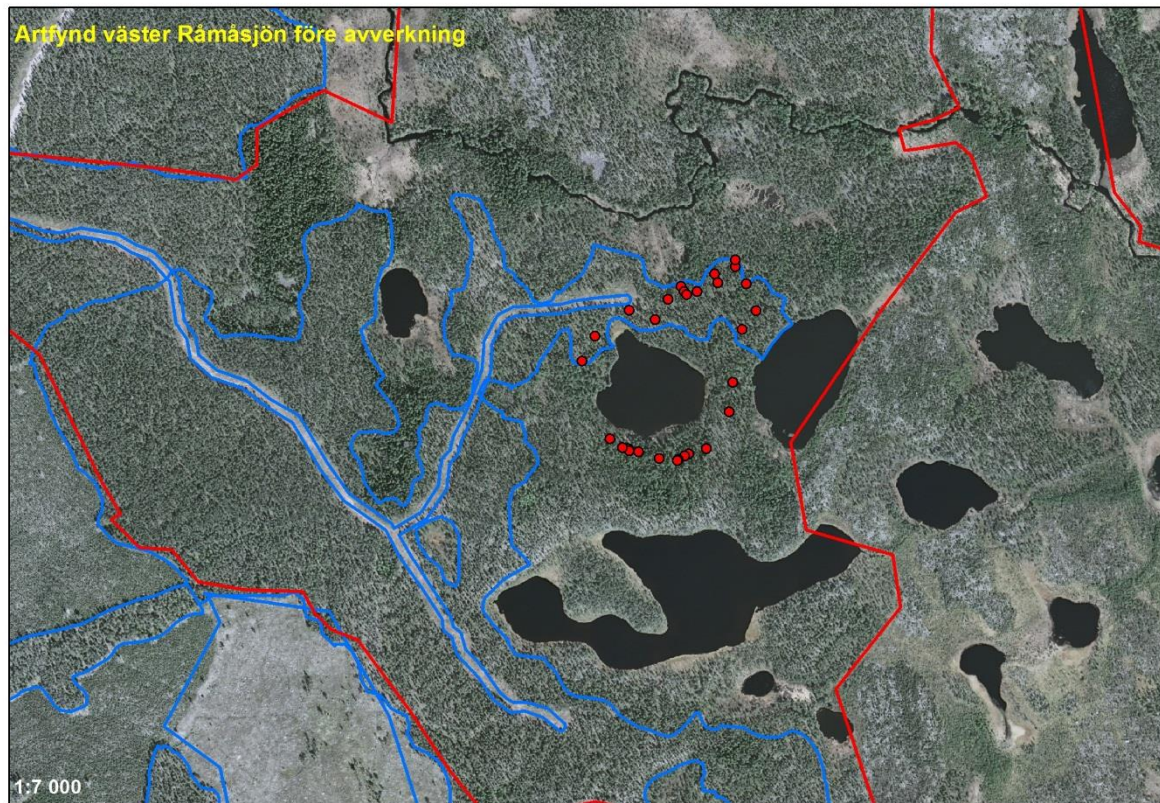
Sveaskog's clear-felling forestry of natural old-growth pine forests east of the lakes Flodsjöarna



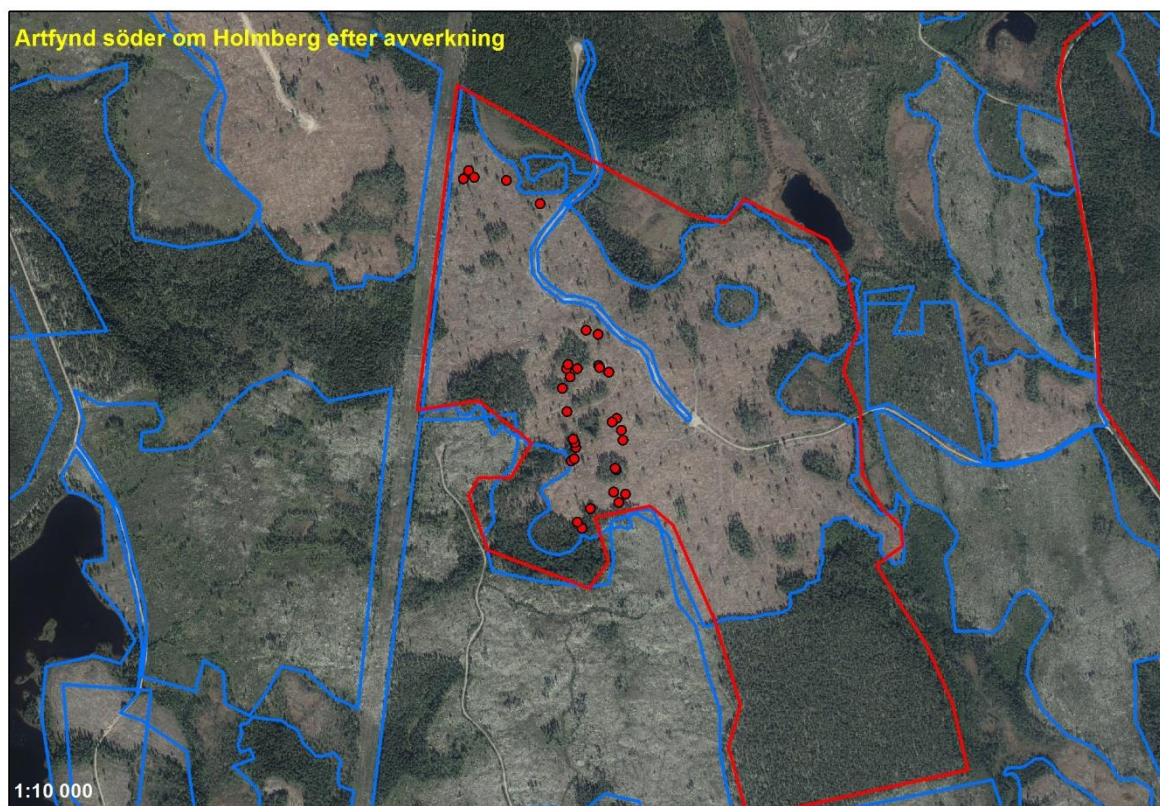
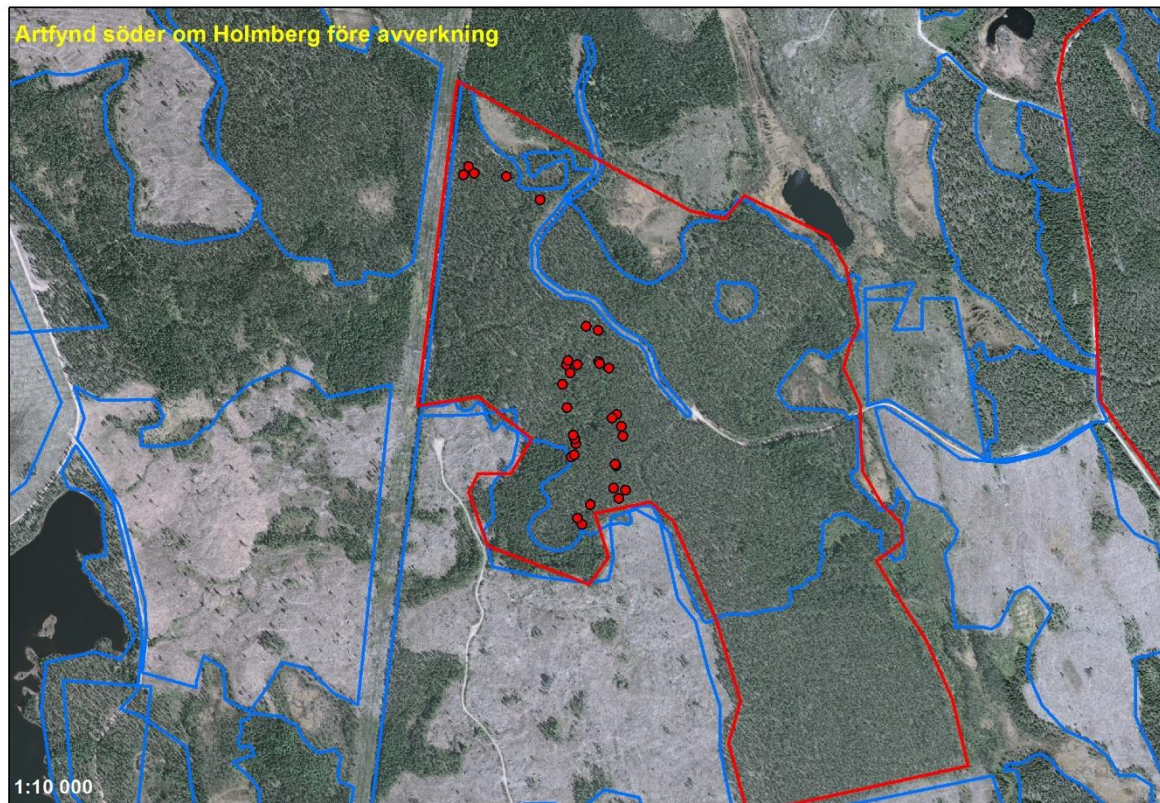
Sveaskog's clear felling forestry norht of the lake Ormtjärnen



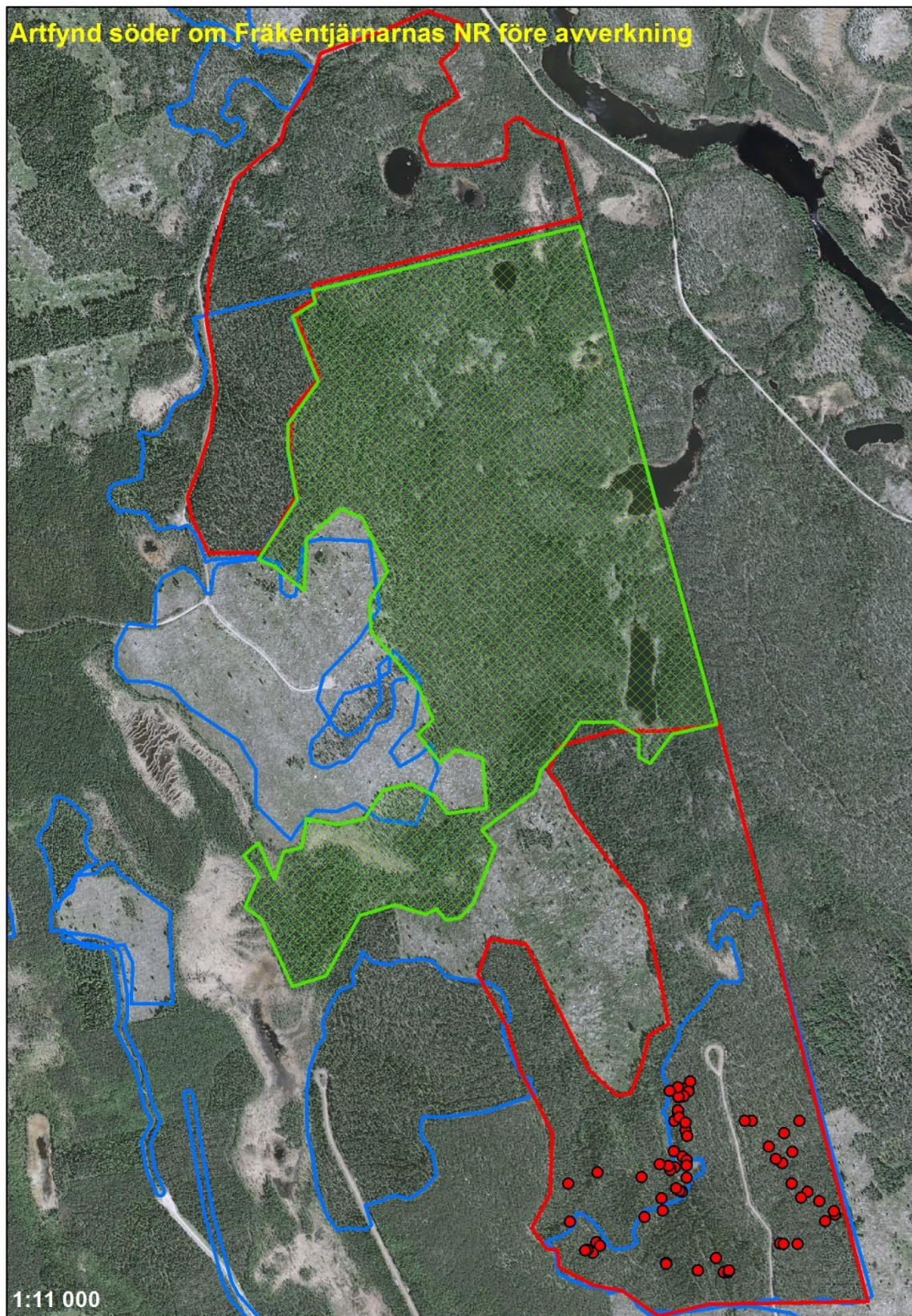
Sveaskog's clear felling forestry west of the lake Råmåsjön



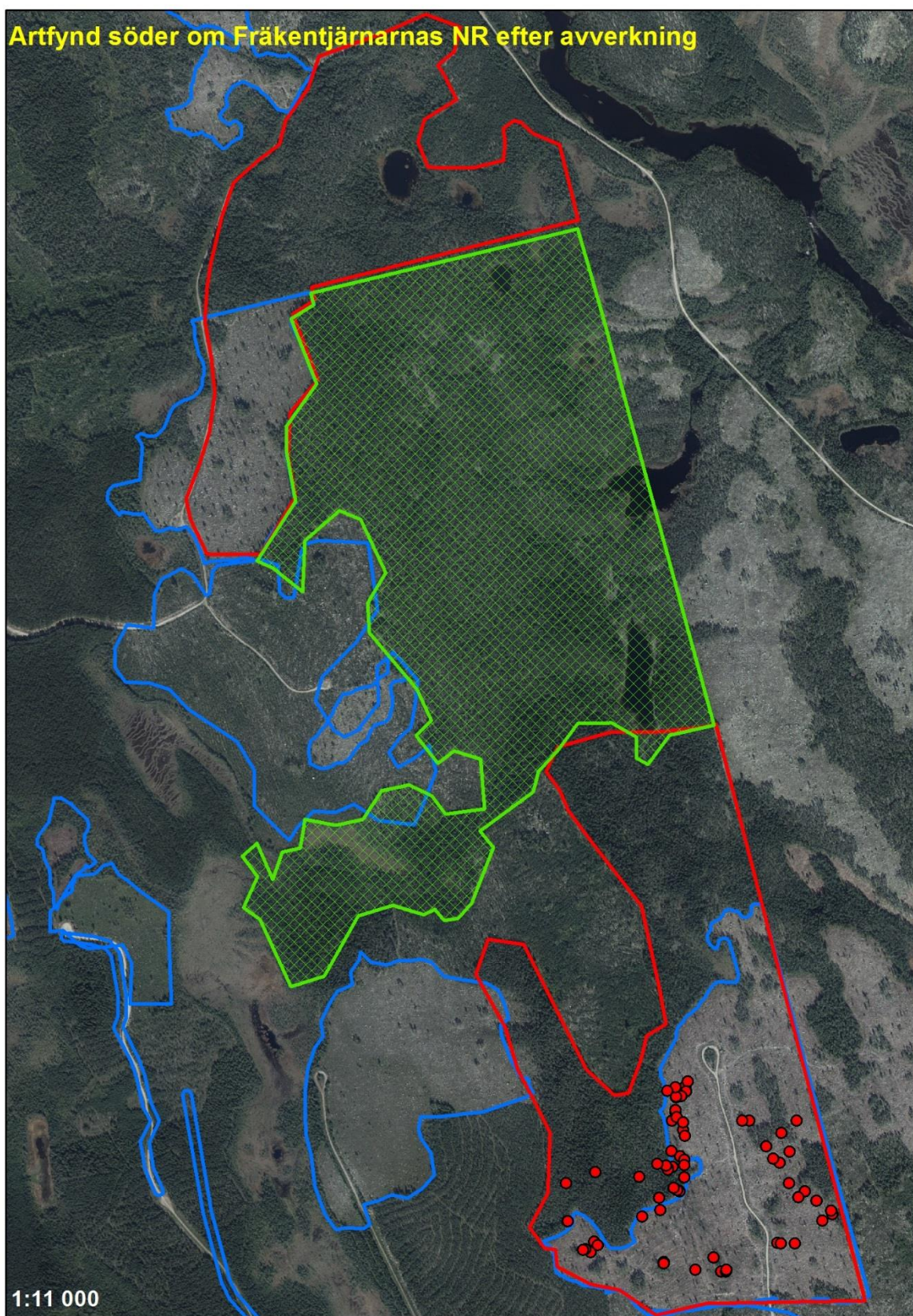
Sveaskog's clear felling forestry at Holmberget



Sveaskog's clear felling forestry at the edge to Fräkensjömyrarnas nature reserve

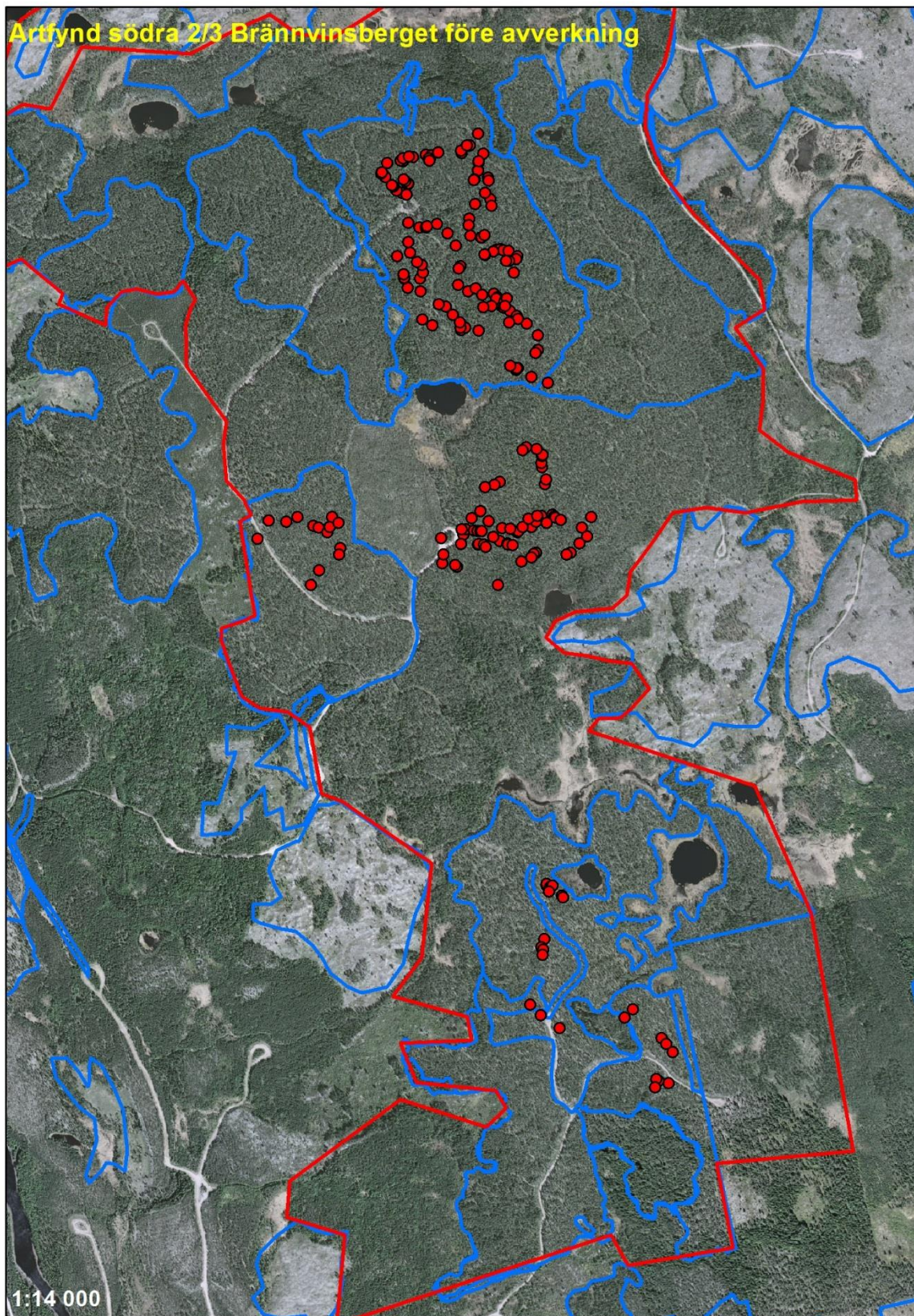


Artfynd söder om Fräkentjärnarnas NR efter avverkning



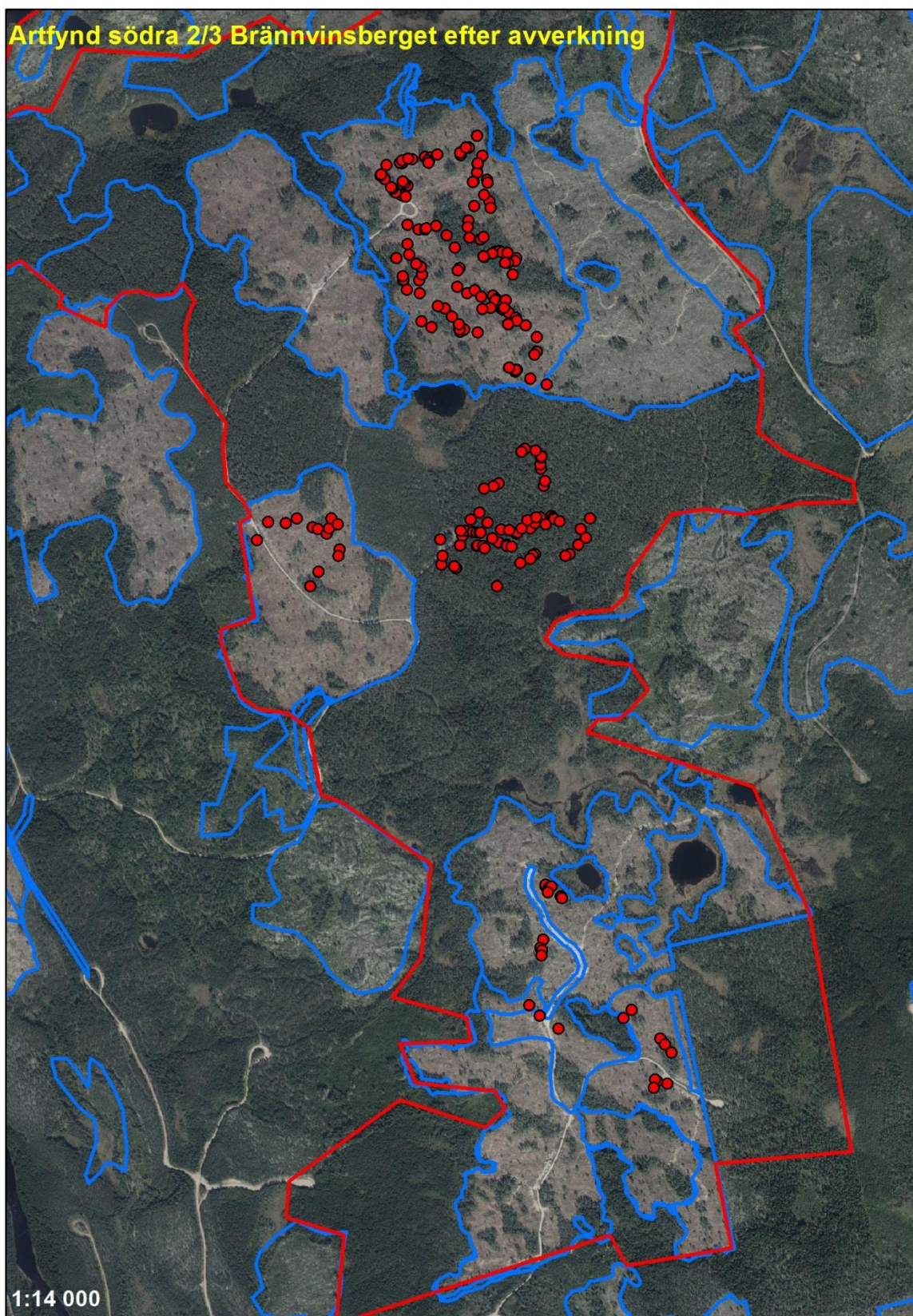
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Sveaskog's clear felling forestry at Brännvinsberget

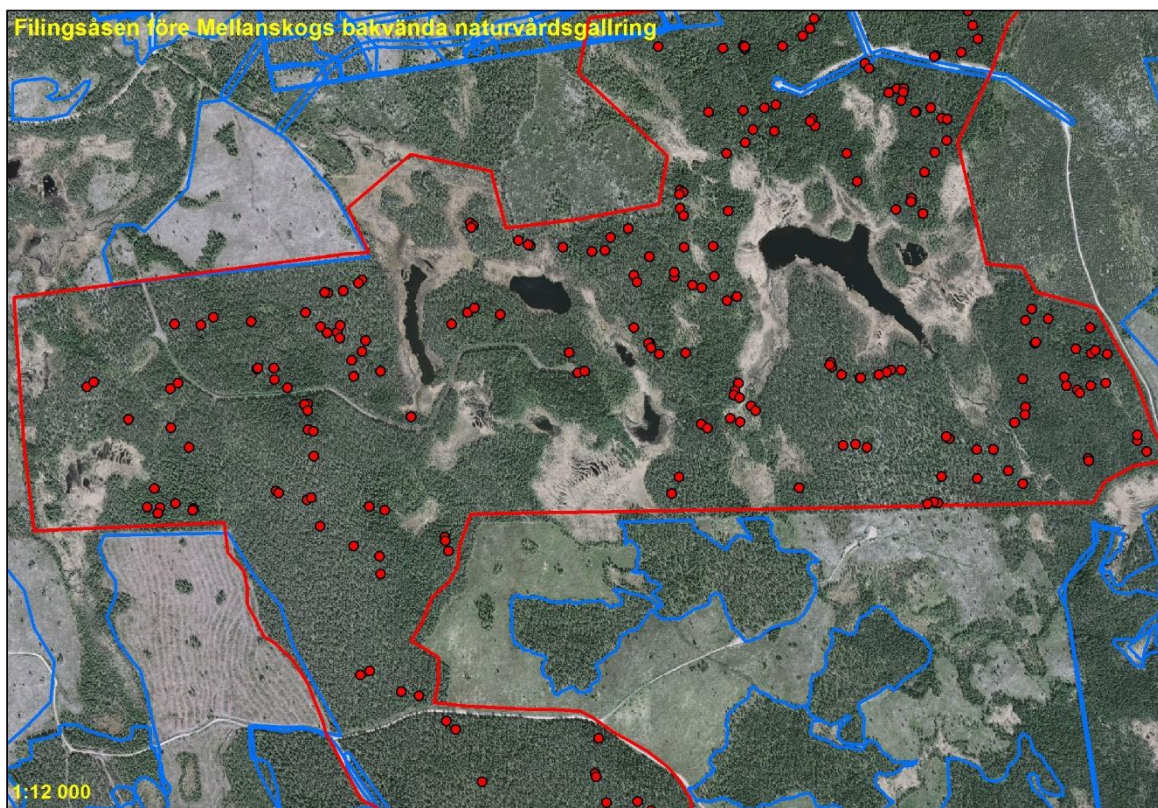


The 831 hectares large area dominated by old-growth pine forests with high conservation values is now more or less devastated by the FSC certified forest company Sveaskog. The fragmentation of the last old-growth forests in Sweden is ongoing and it is done under the assumption that it is certified as environmentally friendly forest management.

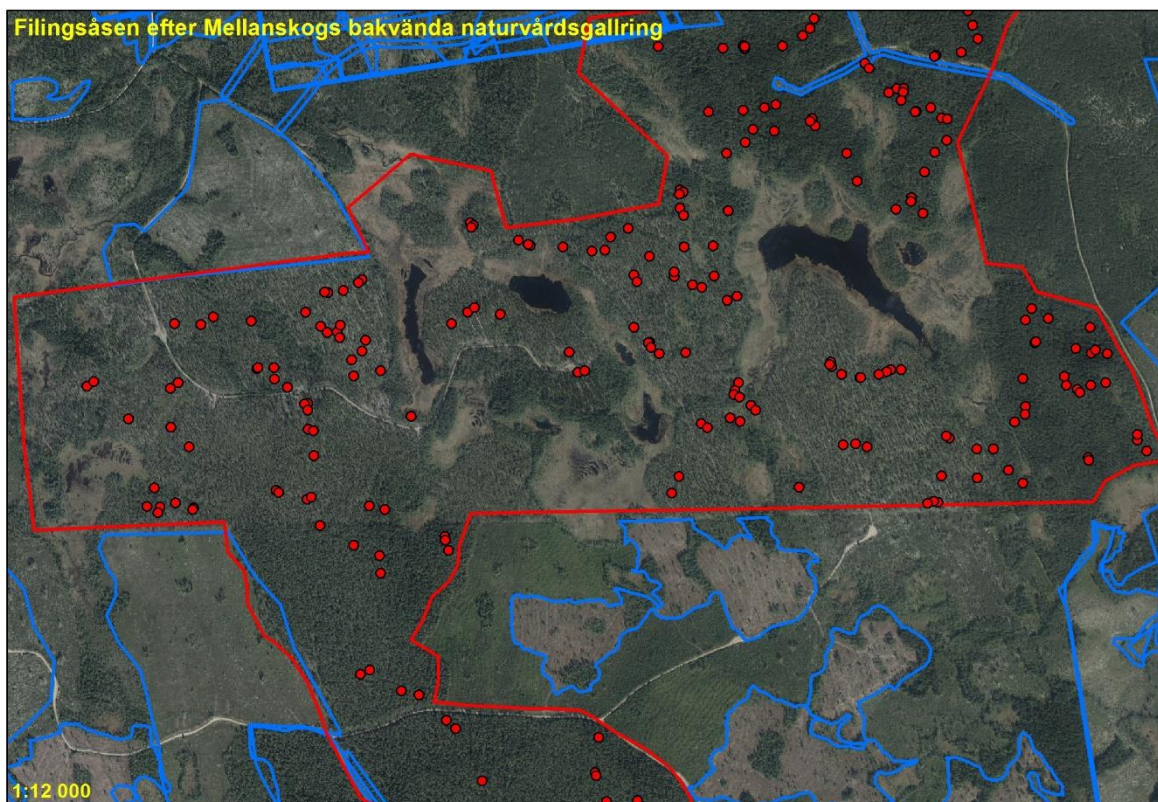
Artfynd södra 2/3 Brännvinsberget efter avverkning



Filingsåsen – old-growth pine dominated forest where the forest company Mellanskog made a thinning.

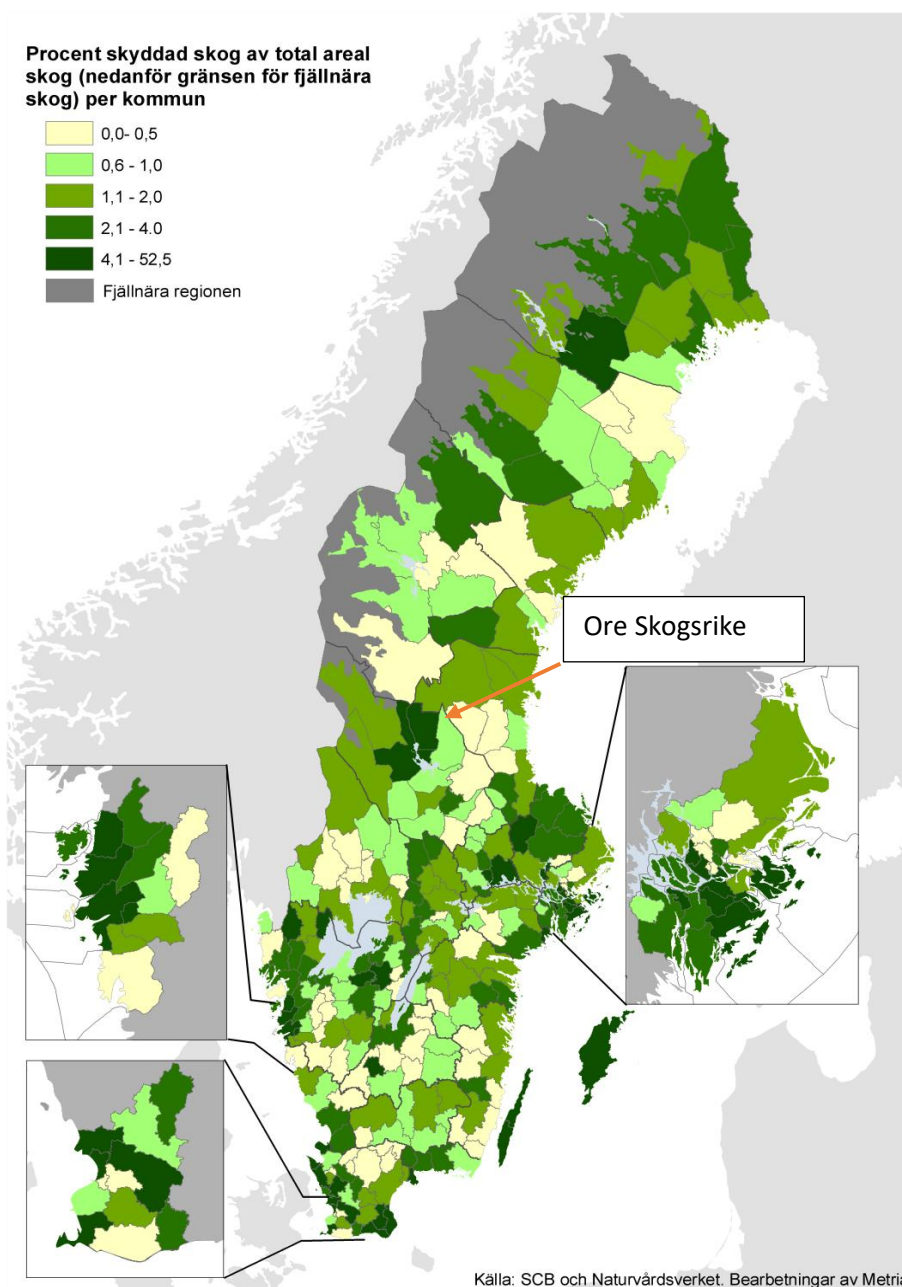


Red dots are findings of indicator species and red-listed species. On the aerial photos one can see how the earlier denser old-growth forest has turned into a more open and sparse forest after the thinning.



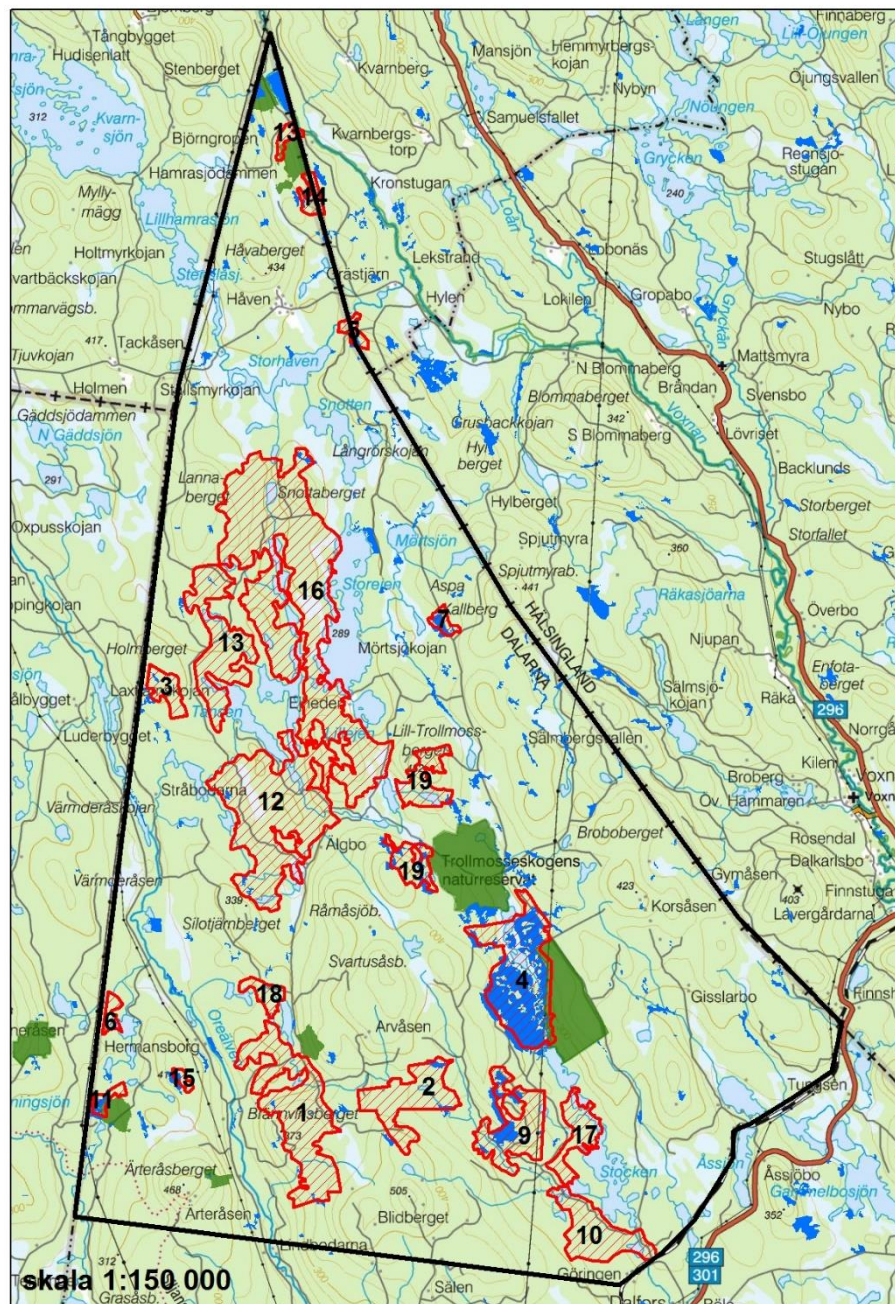
Maps

In the map below, Ore Skogsrike (Ore Forest Kingdom) where our case study was made is marked with an arrow. Ore Skogsrike is about 50 000 hectares large and is located in the north of Rättvik's municipality. The whole municipality is the light green area where the arrow is pointing, and the light green colour represents the amount (percentage) of legally protected forests such as Nature reserves or National parks. In the map you can see all the municipalities in Sweden and the colour showing the amount of legally protected forests. There have been some small changes since 2017 when we made the original report. Legally protected productive forest land in Sweden today is 6% according to the Swedish environmental protection agency.¹¹



Ore skogsrike (Ore forest kingdom)

In the map below all the oldgrowth forests with high conservation values in Ore Forest kingdom are marked with red rasterized outlines (the numbers are from the original report, 2013). Of these more than 600 hectares are clear felled and only two areas have been protected as Nature Reserves. Blue coloured areas are woodland key habitats, green areas are Nature Reserves.



Finally

Evidently, seen in the map, there are very few protected forests in Ore Skogsrike but also in Sweden in total compared to many other, even poorer, countries in the world. As a rich country Sweden ought to be a role model instead of a “bad apple” concerning protection and management of our common forest ecosystems and its biodiversity. Recently an international report on forestry and climate was published which showed that an increasing tree harvest does not help to reach Paris agreement targets.¹² More and more evidence is showing that clear-cut forest management done in an industrial scale is not as good for the climate as marketed by the Swedish logging industry, Forest owner association and many Swedish politicians.

References

- ¹ <https://www.rattvik.se/bygga-bo-och-miljo/naturvard-och-natuomraden/fardiga-projekt/ore-skogsrike.html>
- ² <https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/sustainability-transitions/urban-environment/urban-green-infrastructure/what-is-green-infrastructure>
- ³ <https://www.sverigesmiljomal.se/miljomalen/levande-skogar/>
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- ⁵ <https://www.un.org/en/observances/biological-diversity-day/convention>
- ⁶ <https://skyddaskogen.se/concern-regarding-swedish-state-owned-forest-company-sveaskog-s-large-scale-forest-fellings/?lang=en>
- ⁷ <https://www.skogen.se/nyheter/bakvand-naturvardsgallring>
- ⁸ <https://se.fsc.org/se-sv/regler/skogsbruksstandard#the-fsc-national-forest-stewardship-standard-of-sweden>
- ⁹ <https://pefc.se/vara-standarder/svenska-pefc-standarden>
- ¹⁰ <https://www.skogsstyrelsen.se/aga-skog/du-och-din-skog/frihet-under-ansvar/>
- ¹¹ <https://www.naturvardsverket.se/data-och-statistik/skog/skog-formellt-skyddad/>
- ¹² [https://www.syke.fi/en-US/Current/Increasing_tree_harvest_does_not_help_to\(63331\)](https://www.syke.fi/en-US/Current/Increasing_tree_harvest_does_not_help_to(63331))