



Advancing Biodiversity and Landscape Values with Traditional Rural Habitats Grazing

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Wooded meadow near Kastelholm in Ahvenanmaa in the Finnish Archipelago (Photo: Michael den Herder).

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In *Finland*, traditional rural habitats such as wooded meadows, wood pastures and coastal pastures form a unique part of the country's cultural heritage. These landscapes, shaped over centuries through low-intensity agricultural practices, are the home for many plant and animal species that have adapted to and are dependent on human land management and use. In recent decades, changes in farming practices and intensification or abandonment of agricultural lands have led to a decline in these semi-natural habitats clearly affecting the ecosystem services they provide. Reintroducing and maintaining grazing in traditional rural habitats offer an essential pathway to restore ecological functions, safeguard biodiversity, and support landscape conservation.

Traditional rural habitats rely on low intensity grazing by livestock, typically cattle, sheep, and occasionally horses, to prevent encroachment by shrubs and trees. Grazing keeps rural habitats open and sunlight available for a more diverse herb layer which is beneficial for local fauna including pollinators, insects, birds, and small mammals. Without grazing, these species-rich habitats quickly turn into shrubland and eventually woodland, leading to a loss of the unique flora and fauna adapted to semi-open, grazed ecosystems. Grazing can also enhance soil fertility and soil health. Animal manure and urine fertilize the soil, promoting plant growth and soil organic matter. Additionally, these habitats act as carbon sinks and support healthy soils, contributing to climate change mitigation.

In *Finland* maintenance of traditional rural habitats is supported by subsidies from the *Common Agricultural Policy*, and advancing biodiversity and landscape management based on Nature Conservation Act. Besides public support, there is also a private initiative by *Fingrid*, *Finland's* transmission system operator, which gives financial support for maintaining traditional habitats under transmission lines.



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