Forest Fire
Prevention and Education

Life+ Information and Communication project
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FOREST FIRE

A forest fire is an uncontrolled fire in a wild habitat. Fires can be accidental or they can be caused by arson or even lightning strikes. As Estonia is located in a climate zone where heat waves and droughts occur infrequently, the main cause of forest fires is negligence which is categorized under accidents. According to the Estonian Environmental Information Centre, 99% of forest fires are caused by the negligence of people.

Because fires can be very destructive, fire-fighters have developed numerous strategies for extinguishing or controlling wild fires.

IS THE FOREST FIRE PROBLEM IN ESTONIA?

52% of the mainland of Estonia is covered by forests, a total of 2.26 million hectares; half of this is private forest land.

About 7600 ha of forest land has burned down during the last 10 years, creating – according to conservative estimates – environmental damage of about € 1.12 million over the last 6 years alone.

By the year 2009, the average area consumed by forest fires increased significantly from 2 ha to 5.3 ha, being now ten times larger than in the neighbouring countries like Finland.

Forest fires are a threat to production forests, as well as nature reserves and nature protection areas. In one third of the cases, forest fires grow big due to insufficient cooperation between the different authorities responsible for forest fire detection, extinguishing and survey. This is mostly due to their different structures and an insufficient level of networking. The subsequent damage to the forest caused by forest fires should not be underestimated. Environmental impacts as a result of forest fires include the loss of forests as a carbon sink and the emission of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Beside ecological damage, economic losses are also evident: fires cause considerable damage to the stock in the forests and incur fire-fighting costs.

Fire prevention actions (as forest paths, tracks, water supply points, firebreaks, information signs and seminars for young people) targeting both people and the increment of the resistance of forests against fires, are implemented on a broad scale by the State Forest Management Centre (RMK) in Estonia. In private forests, by contrast, such actions remain weak and forest fire prevention has not received first priority in private forest management, although forest fires affect private forests at the same level of intensity as state forests. Supportive measures by the state and the European Union, as for example to create and maintain fire places in private forests, are rarely adopted and receive little popularity compared to other supportive measures. It was recognized that the regional and local authorities responsible for forest fire fighting in Estonia lack good communication. Awareness raising campaigns and the spreading of information on the prevention of forest fires is an essential component in motivating private forest owners. It is necessary to train specialized personnel,
thereby raising their capacity to increase the cooperation for detection, extinguishing and surveying of forest fires.

**LIFE+ AS A POSSIBILITY TO ATTACK FOREST FIRES**

The LIFE programme is the EU’s funding instrument for the environment. The general objective of LIFE is to contribute to the implementation, updating and development of EU environmental policy and legislation by co-financing pilot or demonstration projects with European added value.

LIFE began in 1992 and to date there have been three complete phases of the programme (LIFE I: 1992-1995, LIFE II: 1996-1999 and LIFE III: 2000-2006). During this period, LIFE has co-financed some 3104 projects across the EU, contributing approximately € 2.2 billion to the protection of the environment.

During the period 2007-2013, the European Commission will launch one call for LIFE+ project proposals per year. Proposals must be eligible under one of the programme’s three components: LIFE+ Nature and Biodiversity, LIFE+ Environment Policy and Governance, and LIFE+ Information and Communication.

**LIFE+ Information & Communication**

This new component will co-finance projects relating to communication and awareness raising campaigns on environmental, nature protection or biodiversity conservation issues, as well as projects related to forest fire prevention (awareness raising, special training).

**FOREST FIRE PREVENTION AND EDUCATION**

Europe’s political leaders have acknowledged the importance of forests and their multiple functions regarding the aim to halt the loss of biodiversity, and have set up several policy objectives to protect forests. Forests are subject to national policy; however, various EU policies and strategies influence national forest management. These strategies refer to regional and local activities as the best tool to raise awareness of and fight against forest fires through citizen involvement. Relating the problem of local incidents, citing examples close to the participants and a rotation principle generating constant media attention are factors important for success. The rotation principle ensures the constant attention of the media and target groups, by having one county in focus for a certain period and addressing all target groups within that period of time. Constant reviews, using the comments made by participants and citing local examples, ensure that the project is interesting and up-to-date.

The innovative approach, targeting **multiple stakeholders’ involvement** within the topic of forest fires, ensures the sustainability of the campaign.

The official and long name of the project is Raising Awareness of Forest Fires and the Training of Forest Fire Agents and Volunteers in Estonia.
The objectives of the project were as follows:

- To enhance the implementation of forest fire prevention measurements, by increasing motivation through trainings, seminars and raising awareness.
- Contribute in a considerable manner to fulfilling the EU’s overarching objective to halt the loss of biodiversity via the raising of forest fire awareness.
- To considerably reach the targets set as priorities in the EU Forest Action Plan: protection of forests against biotic and abiotic factors via awareness raising and an increase in knowledge.
- To enhance networking at the regional and local level, in line with the EU’s strategic policies.
- To increase awareness of forest fires and measurements, to address them in everyday life through dissemination of information.

PROJECT AREAS AND KEY MESSAGE

The project was carried out in six regions in Estonia. Regions were chosen according to the fire danger ratio, where the counties with higher danger were preferred:

- Harju County
- Ida-Viru County
- Põlva County
- Läänke-Viru County
- Pärnu County
- Lääne County

Through the project, we communicated and explained the nature and problem of forest fires, in compliance with the EU’s Forest Action Plan priorities. That was one of the key messages of the project.

Another important thing was to explain and educate people about forest fire prevention actions in order to minimize damage, in compliance with the Forest Action Plan’s priorities.

We brought and shared the knowledge about best practices in fire prevention for the public, forest owners, fire agents and different state authorities from other EU Member States like Latvia and Finland, and from Australia. Additionally, we raised the skills and know-how of fire agents and forest owners.

We managed to bring together members from responsible authorities on the regional and state level, to enhance better networking among responsible authorities for their everyday work. Several say that they are communicating between themselves more efficiently.

Information about different support measures set up by the EU for forest fire prevention proved to be important to stakeholders and increased forest fire prevention in Estonia.
Volunteers and specialists in forest fire prevention actions were trained in different regions via an integrated and participative approach appreciated by the EU, which raised their skills in forest fire prevention activities.

**ACTIONS AND RESULTS OF THE PROJECT**

The project aimed to directly increase awareness of forest fires and their prevention in the 6 counties in Estonia defined as having a high or moderate risk for forest fires, and indirectly in other Estonian counties (via media). As a result, we saw actions carried out for different target groups.

- network building among the responsible organisations
- awareness raising campaigns for visitors to the forest
- raising awareness of forest owners
- awareness raising campaigns for youngsters
- training for forest fire prevention
- training for forest fire prevention-volunteers
- final conference

Following map shows the areas, what were visited during different study trips. Some places were visited twice with different groups e.g. Nõva area (between Läänemaa and Harjumaa). Points are showing the closest village to the forest we visited.
Effective Communication

Speaker asked from the audience, where all the representatives of authorities were sitting, who knows what phone number is 1524? No one knew. It is the number of rescue information. The representative of Agricultural Ministry took out the phone and saved the number, so that She

NETWORK BUILDING AMONG THE RESPONSIBLE ORGANISATIONS

Six meetings took place between specialists from the ERS, RMK, Environmental Board, Environmental Inspectorate and private forestry representatives, to discuss how forest fire management could be made more efficient in Estonia. The component aimed to strengthen networking and the exchange of information between the different institutions on a local or regional level. During the meetings, problems in different regions were mapped, thereby allowing the rest of the awareness raising campaigns to take them to consideration.

During the project, several propositions were made to different authorities, such as: is it necessary to have the requirement of year-round access for water ponds in the forest, when in winter the water is frozen, no one opens up the roads, and fires do not occur in the forest? Who is responsible for informing a forest owner whose forest was on fire? The main problem is how to reach a person who does not comprehend their responsibility in nature, when they take an ATV or cigarettes into forest.

Throughout the project, communication between responsible organisations improved greatly.

Some examples:

- Acceptance and dissemination of the materials provided
  - E-mails about inquiries of different material and additional information about statistics. Changes in Fire Safety law.
  - Better surveying and monitoring of forest fires
  - Acceptance that the methodology for assessing forest fire danger needs to be changed.
  - Communication between authorities in order to publicise press releases announcing fire danger.

- Mutual recognition of the different authorities
  - Leaders in different organisations and levels contacted either the Private Forest Centre or a project team in order to find additional information about forest fire prevention.
  - Active communication during and after the meetings.

- Key contacts for each county.
- Rescue information number in the Foresters’ calendar for 2012.
AWARENESS RAISING CAMPAIGNS FOR VISITORS TO THE FOREST

Events took place in six counties in Estonia with a high or moderate risk of forest fires, with the possibility to use the same structure in the case of a project for counties with a lower fire risk index. The campaign was targeted towards visitors to the forests. With this project we discovered that the event, where we take forest visitor target groups into the forest, wouldn’t work in this manner – lack of interest was quite high; we managed to educate less than 100 people (83 to be precise) with six seminars. Therefore, we suggest media campaigns for this specific target group in the future. Quite possibly there is the belief that forest fires are not a problem in Estonia. We covered the following topics:

- What are dangers and benefits (e.g. having natural forest fires as an important part of the regeneration of forests) of forest fires?
- What are reasons for forest fires? What does it cost for the nature and for state?
- What prevention measures can be applied?
- What to do in case of forest fire?
- How can everyone contribute to preventing forest fires—and why this is important?
- What is the role of the Estonian state in case of forest fires?

According to feedback, visitors who participated in our events recognized that they now possess better knowledge about forest fires (their reasons, their threats and benefits, prevention measures) and know how to react to forest fires.

Visitors were searching for advice at the PFC and we sent an information letter about the rules for building a fire before Midsummer’s Day (St. John’s Day).
AWARENESS RISING FOR FOREST OWNERS

Forest owners are on a different level with their knowledge about forest fires. Some of the societies and unions have had tutorial days organised by local fire departments; some forest owners have participated in an information day about fire prevention incentives and support measures. Most of them, however, haven't had any contact with the topic of forest fire prevention. It is necessary to approach the target groups in different regions individually, taking into consideration their previous experience and what exactly would be of interest to forest owners. In spite of the different approach, we managed to cover the following topics:

- What is fire and which forest type’s burn?
- What are the reasons for forest fires and what to do in case of a forest fire (including cooperation wise)?
- What are the dangers and benefits (e.g. having natural forest fires as an important part of the regeneration of forests) of forest fires
- What prevention measures can be applied?
- What support measures are provided and how to apply for them?
- What is the voluntary fire fighting service and what the role of the Estonian state is in case of forest fires. What is the programme LIFE+.

Forest owners were interested in prevention measurements and general knowledge about forest fires. The biggest event for family forest owners happened this year on the land of a private forest owner, whose forest burned down. He was selected as forest manager of the year 2010. Some societies approached us later in the autumn to hold a training day about forest fires, and our lecturer discussed the topic at one event. All together we organised six seminars for forest owners. They took place in Harjumaa, Ida-Virumaa, Põlvamaa, Läänemaa, Lääne-Virumaa and Pärnumaa and 140 forest owners participated. Forest owners were searching for advice at the PFC.
AWARENESS RAISING CAMPAIGNS FOR YOUNGSTERS

Most successful was the campaign for youngsters. We managed to exceed the estimated number of young people engaged with this project and train 246 kids instead on the estimated 150. We organized 10 events for the youngsters.

We strongly suggest you avoid creating awareness raising campaigns for visitors involving the taking of them to the forest and instead create a specially tailored course for forest owners in different regions. When looking at organising an awareness raising campaign for kids, it is just the opposite: is very good to take youngsters to the forest and let them touch and see the burned areas, and a standard lecture used.

We covered following topics:

- What are dangers and benefits (e.g. having natural forest fires as an important part of the regeneration of forests) of forest fires?
- What are reasons for forest fires?
- What prevention measures can be applied?
- What to do in case of forest fire?
- How can everyone contribute to preventing forest fires-and why this is important?
- What is voluntary fire fighting service and what is rescue youth group?
- What is the role of the Estonian state in case of forest fires?
TRAINING FOR FOREST FIRE PREVENTION

Under this activity we focused on training for fire fighting agents, in order to improve their capacity to prevent forest fires in the defined counties. Trainings included a theoretical and practical part and a standard was set for further trainings to also be applied in other counties. Specific materials were prepared and international specialists attended the seminars.

- The nature of forest fires (reasons for forest fires, areas in the forest which should receive special attention, high-seasons for forest fires)
- How to detect hot spots/trouble spots and how to avoid their emergence? (Partly practical measurements, e.g. how, where and when to gather dry or dead forest materials)
- How to inform the public efficiently on the evidence of hot spots/trouble spots? (With practical examples in the forest)
- What is the nature of forest fire as a fire and how to respond in the best way to it (Including in three of the workshops international experts)
- What to do after the extinction of the forest fire? What to keep in mind, who to inform, how to check on the old fire places? (partly practical with different intensity for volunteers and forest fire fighting agents/specialists)

In conclusion we have carried out 6 trainings for 89 forest fire agents in total (target was 60 agents). International contacts with forest fire fighting specialists were established.

TRAINING FOR FOREST FIRE PREVENTION-Volunteers

Trainings for volunteers included a theoretical and practical part. The focus was to increase the number of volunteers in fire fighting in the counties and thus strengthen the network. Specific materials were prepared in the course of the trainings for further dissemination. The training activity focused on “best reactions in case of forest fires”. This included, for example, in the line: "how to react properly": memorizing the location of a fire and calling the Estonian fire brigade, which will prevent any unnecessary loss of forest habitats due to an uncontrolled forest fire spreading. Both training activities dealt with:

- The nature of forest fires (reasons for forest fires, areas in the forest which should receive special attention, high-seasons for forest fires)
- How to detect hot spots/trouble spots and how to avoid their emergence? (Partly practical measurements, e.g. how, where and when to gather dry or dead forest materials)
- How to inform the public efficiently about the evidence of hot spots/trouble spots? (With practical examples in the forest)
- What is the nature of the forest fire as a fire and how to respond in the best way to it (Including international experts in three of the workshops)
- What to do after the extinguishing of the forest fire? What to keep in mind, who to inform, how to check on the old fire places? (Partly practical, with different intensity for volunteers and forest fire fighting agents/specialists).

In conclusion we have carried out 6 trainings for 90 forest fire volunteers in total (target was 90 agents). International contacts with forest fire fighting specialists were established.
**FINAL CONFERENCE**

The final conference with international experts, national authorities and representatives of all target groups draw the attention of the media to the subject treated. The final conference started new co-operations and dissemination of the project results beyond the project. There was a strong public participation and acceptance and recognition on the topic of forest fires.

From the international community, the representative from CEPF was present. We invited other participants from the people dealing with fire+forests community, but there were several international conferences happening at the same day all over the Europe. It seems to be popular time for gaining the public attention. However we had visitors from Polish State Forest Agency and CEPF.

We managed to create a video about the conference, were it would be possible to listen and watch the presentations. It is available on the project webpage www.eramets.ee/life.

- International contacts were established – representatives from Finland, Latvia, Australia, Poland, and Sweden (CEPF representative from Belgium) were present.
- Over 125 people participating.
- Attention of the media – several radio and newspaper interviews in Estonian as well as Russian.

**THE TOOLKIT**

A toolkit has been assembled, and it can be improved over time and used by different target groups and institutions to explain forest fires. The toolkit is the core element of the project and provides a set of materials for awareness raising campaigns (tailored to the needs of the different target groups: visitors to the forest, forest owners and youngsters) now, when the project has ended.

There is opening video, information about the best prevention areas, presentation about forest fires in general (with comparison to other continents) and international guest’s presentations (according to the target group).

The materials include the best practices and practical information on fire agent trainings and the authority network. The toolkit was developed by the Private Forest Centre (PFC) in close cooperation with ERS.
**TRANSFERABILITY**

**International level**

The format of the project and the conception of the toolkit can be transferred to other countries. For the replicate process of the toolkit and seminars to be possible, we have created a lecturers ABC in Estonian Russian and English languages. All the information in Estonian is not relevant for audience speaking Russian or English due to systems that we have in Estonia and that cannot be copied or transformed into other countries. Some of the general content of the knowledge can be transferred and adapted into their conditions pretty well and those parts have been translated.

Nevertheless we suggest this seminar system for countries bigger than Estonia (networking meetings followed by campaigns for all the target groups).

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**Meetings with local authorities responsible for fire management and environment management**

- Training for fire agents
- Training for fire agents
- Seminar for youngsters
- Seminar for visitors

**Seminars and trainings for target groups**

**Mobile exhibition in the region**

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Our suggestion from the experience would be to other countries to transfer:

- State forest managers should host and educate youngsters during field trips in forests. Material composed during Life+ FFPE project is suitable, but needs to be updated according to host country regulations;
- Forest owner’s trainings with project material needs to be updated with an information that is pertinent for country.
- Knowledge, methods and experiences between the target groups and regional-local level.

**Cluster wise**

Our project strategy focused on building strong relationships between organisations that form a cluster that prevents and fights against forest fires. For that we activated institutions who deal with forest fires according to their geographical, sectoral (environment, security etc.), horizontal (interconnections between businesses at a sharing of resources level e.g. knowledge management) and vertical clusters (i.e. a supply chain cluster)

We enhanced the communication flow geographically and vertically - local to national level as well as from one county to another, from one region to another. This can be carried over to other economical clusters as well. Horizontal information flow for example between Environmental Board and forest societies improved too. We transferred the information and communicated it to different sectors – environment, agriculture, security too.
We see that it is also possible to try to implement the same kind of project and logic to other clusters according to knowledge wise.

**National level**

On national level it is possible to continue to exchange the information between different stakeholders and to different target groups via networking seminars and with the help of the toolkit. That creates the possibility of information transfusion and carry-over. For example information gathered by or for fire fighters can be used in materials created to forest owners and youngsters. Other way around the information package compiled for forest owners can be useful for Estonian Rescues Board prevention unit. This parallel transferability of information means also that the facts and message has not many contradictions as parties must communicate with each other.
WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE EFFECTS TO ESTONIA?

A forest fire has two components – the forest and the fire. Institutions dealing with forests know about forest dynamics and nature management. Fire institutions know the need for preventing and the techniques on how to suppress the fire. In order to prevent forest fires, we need the knowledge from both types of institutions. Because of this project that brought together institutions, the level of collaboration and mutual understanding has increased considerably. In the long run, this is the biggest positive effect that Estonia could have received this project – public awareness campaigns will continue to live due to those organisations now knowing so much more about each-other.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

By decline in the amount of the forest fires, we are reducing the biodiversity loss, reductions of emission and we are saving recourses in the means of economy. A decline in the amount of forest fires can be calculated in the future. However already at 2011 the number of forest fires and the average area of forest fire show decreasing trend. Hopefully it continues to decline due to active communication, more updated information and the smoother flow of information to public.

Monitoring the decrease in forest fires (environmental benefit) will be done with trend line and the data will be taken from the official analyse done by Veljo Kütt. Statistics are calculated according to the number of events and the area that was burned. Data will be analysed by professionals in Estonian Environment Information Centre. Example of year 2010 can be found: http://www.keskkonnainfo.ee/failid/Metsatulekahjud_2010.pdf.

Because of this project that brought together institutions, the level of collaboration and mutual understanding has increased considerably. In the long run, this is the biggest positive effect that Estonia could have received this project – Estonian Rescue Service has understood the necessity to prevent rather than to extinguish. During the preparation phase (since 2007-2008) of the project and later on during the project they have clearly stated it. Partly because of that, the Estonian Rescue Board has now different structure. Due to understanding the necessity of

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prevention (but not only that), Estonian Rescue Service has been taking the course of closing the professional fire services and have been training volunteers. It is more cost-efficient for the state, however it doesn’t create more dangerous situation as volunteers will be with higher level of knowledge both in prevention as well as extinguishing.

Dealing with forest fire prevention campaigns is much cheaper then to maintain the brigades for operational work and for extinguishing.

If it is possible to reduce the number of small fires (that can become crow fires) we can same beside environment, the resources as well. As we can see the reduction of forest fires, the potential threat for losing a forest for private forest owner is smaller.

In one third of the case forest fires grow big due to insufficient cooperation between the different authorities responsible for forest fire detection, extinction and survey. During the project we raised the skills and know-how of fire agents and forest owners. Volunteers and specialists in forest fire prevention actions were trained in different regions via an integrated and participative approach appreciated by the EU, which raised their skills in forest fire prevention activities. C4 and D1 events resulted in better cooperation between Environmental Board (forest maps, education) and ERS (extinguishing, prevention). This will result in better cooperation and faster reaction between those institutions during forest fire.

Evaluation about the long term environmental benefits are based on answers given by participants and are analysed according to the objectives of the project. Secondly we analyse the long term influence of the project through monitoring the decrease in forest fires.

In the survey people are asked if, with whom and how they cooperated with other participating organizations after the Life+ project. Participants confirmed that they have had changes what were suggested during the meetings. One of participants said that their organisation have actualized their plans and databases. Respondents believed that the influence of the meeting was positive. They said that they got to know how the information moves in other organisation and how to spread the information in their own company. There were contacts created and future ideas developed for future cooperation.

**Cost-benefit discussion**

We used less money than we assumed (saved app. 70 000 eur) even though implementing all actions. As the timeframe was shorter, we could implement some actions with fewer costs. Majority of the carryover came from personnel costs and can be explained with the shorter project timeframe.

We managed to integrate most of our travelling need with PFC regular activities therefore additionally to cost-efficiency we were environmental friendly (e.g. moving the exhibition when we had other events happening in the same region). Additional downsize was created with the law that banns the subsistence costs for visits for national business trips.

We also learned during the project that it would be dissipative to print and translate all the materials in to Russian language and into English language as simply there is not enough the public and target group to use this material (volunteers are speaking Estonian).
Rescue Information Phone line – 1524 if...

- you need advice on your home safety;
- you need a and contact information about rescue officials;
- you would like to know under what conditions and where you can do the fire
- safety tips for making open fire;
- for more information on joining the Rescue prevention campaigns;
- you have a emergency issue and you do not know where to turn.

For additional information please visit www.eramets.ee/life

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