



LIFE Saimaa Seal - Safeguarding the Saimaa Ringed Seal

LIFE12 NAT/FI/000367

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Contact details:

Project Manager: Raisa TIILIKAINEN

Tel: +358 40 754 1449

Email: [raisa.tiilikainen@metsa.fi](mailto:raisa.tiilikainen@metsa.fi)

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Project description:

Background

Once widespread in Finland, the Saimaa ringed seal (*Phoca hispida saimensis*) is now found only in the Saimaa fragmented freshwater lake complex. With a small population of about 310 seals, it is probably the world's most endangered seal species and is categorized by the IUCN as Critically Endangered. In Annex II of the Habitats Directive, it is listed as a species that needs strict protection. The most severe threats to the seal population are fishing and disturbance during breeding. Climate change also poses an increasingly serious long term threat. A Finnish national conservation strategy and action plan for the Saimaa ringed seal was adopted in 2011, in order to improve the conservation status of the species.

Objectives

The project aims to reduce the main threats to the Saimaa ringed seal, which were identified in the Finnish national conservation strategy. It will, in particular, seek to reduce risks related to fishing, disturbance by humans and climate change. The results of the project will be used in the updating of the conservation strategy and related regulations in 2015-2017. The main goals of the project are:

- To reduce by-catch mortality by developing seal-friendly fishing methods for professional use, by promoting fishing methods suitable for recreational fishing, and by reinforcing compliance with fishing restrictions;
- To reduce human-induced disturbances by identifying and defining risk areas, and by guiding land-use planning and activities in vulnerable areas;
- To facilitate adaptation to climate change by developing a method of producing manmade snow drifts to improve the Saimaa seal's lairing conditions during mild winters;
- To involve local people in conservation actions;

- To update knowledge on essential ecological issues and on potential threats to the seals, as the basis for effective conservation and monitoring;
- To increase the awareness among fishermen, tourists and children about the seal and its protection.

Expected results:

- By the end of the project, a seal-friendly fyke (a type of fishing net) will be approved and in use, 500 fishing nets will have been replaced by traps and 600 3000 old traps will have been made seal-safe, 300 fishermen will have committed to fishing without nets; and recreational fishing in seal areas will have been studied and be better understood;
- Two management plans prepared and adopted for the Natura 2000 areas that are vital for the seal;
- Human disturbance during the seal's breeding season will be analysed. Guidelines will be drafted for land-use planning and management of possible conflict points; and shoreline development and breeding sites will be mapped in six Natura 2000 areas;
- 34 ha land and 600 ha of water will be acquired for nature conservation;
- Capacity will be established for making manmade snowdrifts on a large scale (min. 120 snowdrifts) for securing seal lairs;
- Methods for marking 18 900 hectares of protected areas will be developed, with appropriate information provided to the public;
- The enforcement of fishing restrictions and restricted areas will be reinforced;
- A trained network of volunteers for conservation activities will be established (70 persons, 550 attendees at training events);
- An educational programme will be carried out, involving 106 000 children;
- The seal conservation strategy and action plan, and associated regulations, will be updated and followed up.

Results

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Environmental issues addressed:

Themes

Species - Mammals

Keywords

fishing industry, endemic species, freshwater ecosystem, environmental assessment

## Target species

*Phoca hispida saimensis*

## Natura 2000 sites

SCI	FI0422001	Ilkonselkä
SCI	FI0500001	Kolovesi - Vaaluvirta - Pyttyselkä
SCI	FI0500002	Linnansaari
SCI	FI0500013	Pihlajavesi
SCI	FI0500021	Luonteri
SCI	FI0500024	Lietvesi
SCI	FI0500026	Katosselkä - Tolvanselkä
SCI	FI0500031	Joutenvesi - Pyyvesi
SCI	FI0500171	Hevonniemi
SCI	FI0700018	Oriveden-Pyhäselän saaristot

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## Beneficiaries:

Coordinator	Metshallitus Parks & Wildlife Finland
Type of organisation	National authority
Description	The Natural Heritage Services of Metsähallitus (NHS) is a public authority responsible for nature conservation. It manages and controls the use of most of Finland's state-owned land, as well as its marine and freshwater areas. This includes protected areas and national hiking areas, and their habitats and species.
Partners	South Savo Regional Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment, Finland Finnish Association for Nature Conservation, Finland Finnish Game and Fisheries Research Institute, Finland The Finnish Federation for Recreational Fishing, Finland University of Eastern Finland, Finland University of Turku, Finland Maailman Luonnon Säätiö–World Wide Fund For Nature, Suomen rahasto, Finland

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Administrative data:

Project reference	LIFE12 NAT/FI/000367
Duration	01-AUG-2013 to 31-DEC -2018
Total budget	5,261,612.00 €
EU contribution	3,946,209.00 €
Project location	Etelä-Karjala(Finland Suomi) Etelä-Savo(Finland Suomi) Pohjois-Savo(Finland Suomi) Pohjois-Karjala(Finland Suomi)

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