



Flying Squirrel Advisory Services for Forest Owners – Experiences from the Finnish Forest Centre



A report for Action E2, Engaging general public and landowners

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31.3.2025

In the Flying Squirrel LIFE project (2018-2025), project action E2 aimed to spread knowledge on the Flying squirrel for public and different stakeholders. The Finnish Forest Centre (Suomen metsäkeskus, SMK) specifically aimed to inform and help everyone having questions related to flying squirrel friendly forestry and volunteer conservation METSO program in Finland.

During the last year 2024, the Finnish Forest Centre concluded an advisory project aimed at providing forest owners with information and guidance related to the flying squirrel. The goal was to increase understanding of the species, its habitat requirements, and conservation options, while also offering practical advice on forest management in areas where the species is present.

Targeted Guidance for Forest Owners

The advisory services focused on private forest owners whose properties had previous observations of flying squirrels. Forest resource data was used to identify these properties, and outreach was targeted accordingly. Advisory services were provided through phone calls, Teams meetings and in-person site visits to forests.

The advisory work utilized previously published materials, such as the *Flying Squirrel in Commercial Forests* guide (Liito-orava talousmetsässä), a mapping manual, and earlier advisory materials. A list of frequently asked questions (FAQ) was also compiled to support consistent communication with landowners.

Content and Themes of the Advisory Work

Before launching the advisory effort, a shared guideline was created, structured around three main themes:

1. Forest and Nature Management

- Appropriate harvesting methods for each site
- Nature management approaches for different forest development stages, including mixed-species forests, increasing deciduous trees (aspen, alder, birch), dense spruces, maintaining forest cover, continuous cover forestry, and identifying valuable natural habitats
- Recognizing flying squirrel habitats (without making official boundary decisions)

2. Use of Metsään.fi Service

- Reviewing flying squirrel observations in the service
- Introducing the Laji.fi species portal when needed

3. Voluntary Conservation

- Presenting conservation options through the METSO programme and environmental subsidies
- Assessing eligibility for financial support

Results and Impact

During the project, 330 forest owners were contacted. Most consultations took place over the phone, but several on-site visits were also conducted, especially where landowners had specific concerns or forest management needs.

During site visits, harvesting plans, nature management practices, and conservation opportunities were discussed. Previously recorded flying squirrel observations were reviewed, and species-friendly management practices were proposed.

As a result of the advisory work, around ten environmental subsidy agreements were made, and several properties were forwarded to local ELY Centres for potential permanent conservation agreements.

Forest Owners' Attitudes Toward the Flying Squirrel

Throughout the advisory project, a wide range of views emerged regarding the flying squirrel and its conservation:

- **Positive Attitudes:** Some forest owners welcomed the presence of the flying squirrel, seeing it as part of biodiversity and forest value.
- **Concerns Over Restrictions:** Many were concerned about the limitations imposed by the species' protection, particularly restrictions on logging and delays in forest operations. These raised fears of property value loss and reduced timber income.
- **Perceived Injustice:** Some considered the legal protections unclear, overly bureaucratic, or unfair, especially if compensation for economic losses was seen as insufficient.
- **Desire for Voluntary Approaches:** Many forest owners expressed a strong preference for voluntary, negotiated conservation solutions rather than imposed restrictions.
- **"Silent Conservation":** While several owners were sympathetic to conservation goals, they did not want to formally commit to programs. Instead, they practiced quiet or unofficial protection by voluntarily preserving valuable habitats on their land.

Conclusions

The Finnish Forest Centre's flying squirrel advisory project highlighted the need for practical, individualized support for forest owners. Knowledge about the species and conservation law varied, and economic concerns significantly shaped attitudes.

Advisory work plays a key role in building trust, reducing conflict, and advancing conservation in a collaborative manner. At its best, it can act as a bridge between landowners and conservation goals – helping find solutions that serve the forest, the forest owner, and the protected species alike.



The project has received funding from the LIFE Programme of the European Union. The material reflects the views by the authors, and the European Commission or the CINEA is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.