

Flying Squirrel LIFE

Action A6, Preparation of plans to maintain habitat network within managed forests

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English summary of a description:

Kuinka huomioida liito-orava talousmetsissä? Kuvaus yhteissuunnittelun soveltamisesta Liito-orava-LIFE-hankkeen esimerkkikohteilla. Hurme, E., Koskela, A. & Numminen I. 2023. 20 pages (in Finnish). [Link to the publication on the project website](#)

Description of a joint planning process applied to forest management sites in the Flying Squirrel LIFE project

Flying squirrel (*Pteromys volans*) is a strictly protected species in the European Union. It lives in forests where its breeding sites and resting places must not be destroyed or deteriorated. In Finland, the species exist mostly outside conservation areas that underlines the need of careful forest management.

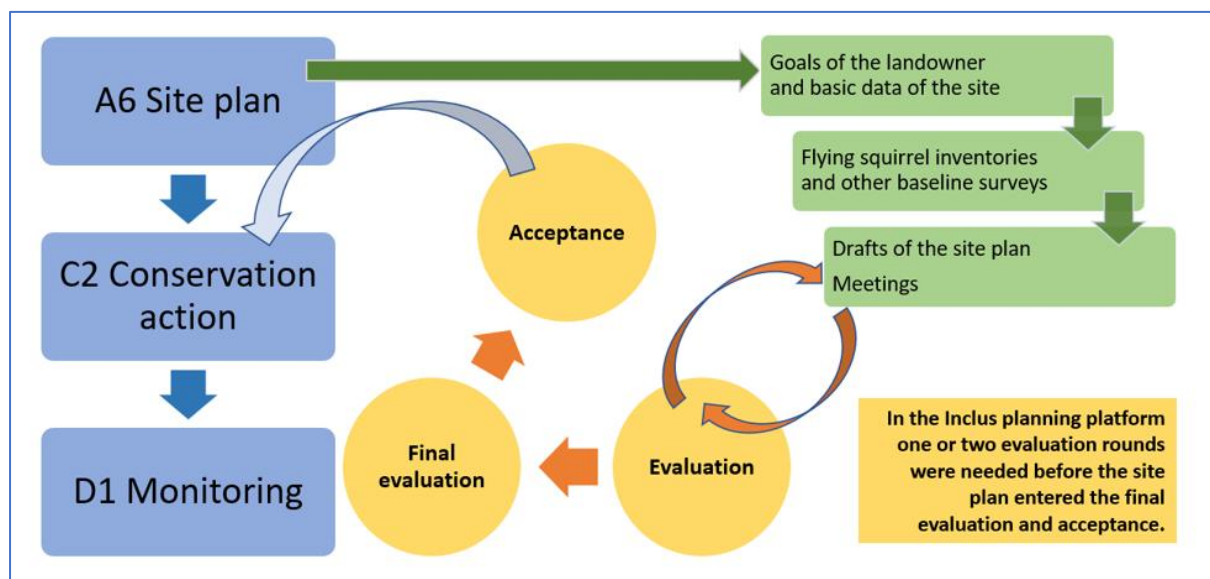
In the Flying Squirrel LIFE project, one part focused on making good examples of illustrating the present legislation. In 2016, nature conservation act changed: the responsibility to consider flying squirrel was moved to the landowner of her/his representative. A nature conservation authority ELY Centre would give advice but not make official delineations for sites. Simultaneously, the ministry of the environment (MoE) and the ministry of agriculture and forestry (MoAF) produced education material to help people in this task.

Examples were prepared for 37 project sites, owned by private landowners or the state. Summaries of site plans are published as project deliverables in 2025 on the project website:
A6 [Summaries of project sites on private land](#)
A6 [Summaries of project sites on state-owned land](#)

A joint planning process in the project was developed to use expertise of various professionals in nature conservation and forestry as well as representatives of landowners. Participating experts represented key beneficiaries in the project: Finnish Forest Centre (SMK), Metsähallitus Forestry Ltd (MHFORESTRY), Finnish Association for Nature Conservation (FANC), Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners MTK (MTK), ELY Centre for Southwest Finland (VARELY) and Metsähallitus Parks & Wildlife Finland (MHPWF). In addition, nature conservation authorities in regional ELY Centres participated in the evaluation process in their areas. There were about 60 people in the process over three years from autumn 2018 to the end of 2021.

The planning process for a project site was flown as follows (see colors in a picture below):

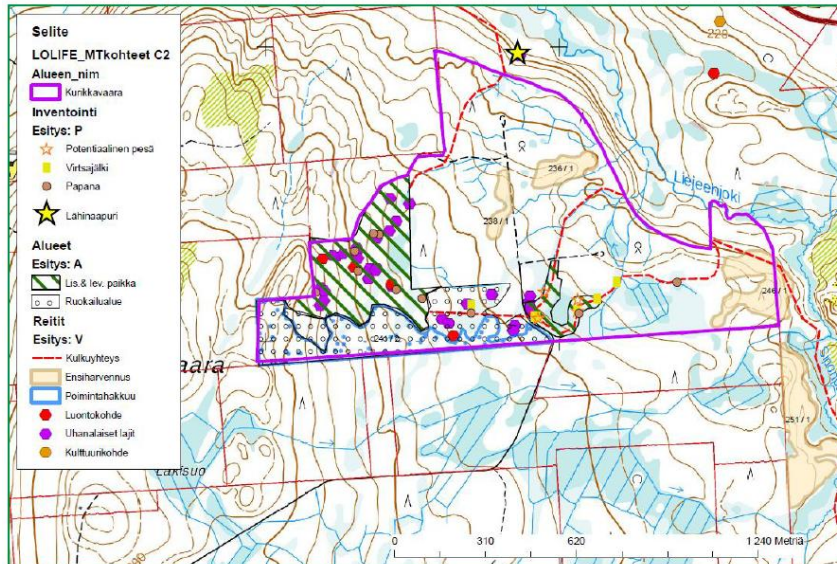
1. The forest planner of a site contacted the landowner and discussed his/her goals for the forest and located existing forest data of the site. (Green)
2. Flying squirrel experts carried out the flying squirrel survey at sites to evaluate the baseline situation. Habitat characteristics and traces (pellets) were marked from the focal site. (green)
3. A forest planner started drafting the plan, Advice was asked from the regional ELY Centre. (green)
4. Drafts were discussed together and modified when needed. No voting was done. Drafts were polished until participating beneficiaries, and a regional ELY Centre accepted it. (yellow)
5. A ready plan was handed over to the landowner, who executed the plan under supervision. (blue)
6. Afterwards, the sites were monitored annually during the project until 2024. (blue)



Picture 1. A graph of a joint planning process applied in the Flying Squirrel LIFE project 2018-2021.

The Inklus planning platform is a multi-planning tool that was developed specifically for the project by Inklus Ltd (former Inforglobe Oy). Drafts of site plans with all related materials were downloaded to the platform, where all participants could see and comment on them. Comments were asked to be constructive so that they could help the planner in clarifying and improving the plan. All comments were made openly with names. Additional online meetings and field visits to sites were made to increase understanding of sites better.

Maps of each project site included all observations related to the flying squirrel and planned forestry measures. A plan included more detailed descriptions of the planned measures as well as their justifications. Example of a state-owned project site Kurikkavaara:



Picture 2. Project site Kurikkavaara on state-owned land (MHFORESTRY). Area with dark green lines is reserved for breeding sites and resting places, and area with open circles for feeding areas for flying squirrels. First thinning is marked with light brown, and selective cutting area with a blue line.

Experiences of the joint planning process

As this was a novel approach, it turned out to be a true learning process. We found that

- it was very important to learn from each other and respect expertise of others
- learning a new way of working needs practice and time
- commitment to a new and challenging process is important.
- Openness and keeping up with agreed schedules is important
- Strengthening trust is irreplaceable
- Perspectives and questions from outsiders may clarify situations. Using facilitation is not a punishment to anyone.

Facilitation services may help in ensuring neutrality of the process that includes different perspectives and values. We used external facilitation in

- discussing opposing views and disagreements
- clarified the project work
- opened misunderstandings
- finding joint perspectives
- agreed of the process
- built a participatory decision-making tool

Notes of commitment:

- Getting to know each other is an essential part in starting the process. In this case, many participants met during the project preparation phase 2016-2017. Face-to-face meetings are needed. In our case, we managed to meet several times before the meeting restrictions of the pandemic, which eased further discussions tremendously. In addition, some meetings could be arranged outside at project sites.
- Beneficiaries were committed to the project with their tasks, budget and agreements. Thus, withdrawal from difficult situations would take some time and can encourage trying a bit more to find solutions after all.



Picture 3. It is essential to meet each other and find time for discussions. Photo Anni Koskela.

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