



# SWEDISH FOREST RESTORATION POLICY

COHERENCE ACROSS FOREST-  
RELATED POLICY AREAS AND  
POLITICAL LEVELS



**SUPERB**  
Upscaling Forest Restoration



This project has received  
funding from the European  
Union's Horizon 2020  
research and innovation  
programme under grant  
agreement No 101036849.

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## Recommended citations

Fleckenstein, Simon & Sotirov, Metodi (2025). Swedish forest restoration policy and policy coherence.



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Forest policy in Europe operates within a complex, multi-sectoral and multi-level policy framework. To effectively implement and scale up forest restoration efforts—such as those outlined in the EU Nature Restoration Law (EU-NRL)—achieving a certain level of coherence across forest-related policy areas (e.g., nature conservation, climate, agriculture, and rural development) and political levels (EU and national/subnational) is deemed essential.

As part of the EU Horizon 2020 SUPERB project, Task 5.1 of Work Package 5 offers valuable insights into the issue of forest restoration policy coherence. Specifically, it examines coherence at the national level across forest-related policy areas (horizontal coherence) and across national and EU levels (vertical coherence). The analysis of horizontal coherence is based on a survey of national forest policy experts in the relevant countries, while the vertical coherence analysis involves a detailed review of EU forest restoration provisions and some key forest restoration indicators and practices, as well as national forest regulatory frameworks.

The present report briefly outlines the key findings for the **case of Sweden**, where forestry interests and legislation play an important role in forest restoration.



# HORIZONTAL FOREST RESTORATION POLICY COHERENCE IN SWEDEN

Sweden is renowned for its abundant forests and a thriving forestry industry with a focus on exports. In 1903, a forestry act was implemented to ensure the continuous renewal of raw materials within privately owned forests. Over time, this legislation was strengthened, and by 1948, it included stringent regulations that promoted afforestation and the careful management of even-aged stands. These measures aimed to guarantee consistent or improved yields, securing a stable supply for industrial consumers (Lindh et al., 2017).

The current version of the **Swedish Forestry Act**, enacted in 1993, states public demands on forest owners and managers. Besides emphasizing the role of forests as a sustainable resource for generating revenue, the act obliges forest owners and managers to consider nature, cultural heritage, reindeer husbandry, and other interests. The **Swedish Forestry Act** does not impose a general clear-cut ban, nor are there any restrictions on the size of final fellings, clear-cuts, and regeneration areas, particularly in lowland areas that dominate Swedish forestry. However, for productive and broadleaved forests, a notification for final clear-cut felling exceeding 0.5 ha must be submitted to the Swedish Forest Agency six weeks in advance. The same requirement applies to felling for purposes other than timber production. Additionally, the act mandates reforestation of harvested sites within three years after the final harvest, ensuring the long-term preservation of the forest area. Apart from provisions related to timber production, the act also emphasizes the preservation of forest biodiversity and the consideration of other interests such as cultural heritage and outdoor recreation. These considerations include maintaining natural species on the site, retaining brush, solitary trees or tree groups, dead trees, and avoiding soil treatment in protective zones near water and wetlands, among others.

The **Swedish Environmental Code**, adopted in 1998 and effective from January 1, 1999, is another significant policy in the context of forest and biodiversity restoration in Sweden. It serves as a framework legislation that provides general provisions for environmental protection. The code's overarching goals include protecting human health and the environment from damage caused by pollutants and other impacts, preserving valuable natural and cultural environments, and conserving biodiversity. Chapter 12:6 of the code



addresses forest management activities related to reforestation, afforestation, and clear-cut management, which, according to national experts, partly contradict the Swedish Forestry Act. Aligned with the Swedish Climate Act introduced in 2017, which aims for zero net emissions by 2045, the **Swedish Environmental Code** connects its goals to ensuring the favorable conservation status and protection of natural habitats and species from the destructive effects of climate change. Other sectoral policies influencing forest and biodiversity restoration practices in Sweden include the **Swedish Off-Road Driving Act** (1975:1313), which regulates all off-road driving of motor vehicles, the **Cultural Heritage Act** (1988:950), governing the protection and preservation of cultural environments, buildings, and ancient remains, and the **Reindeer Husbandry Act** (1971:437), which regulates reindeer herding rights, such as land and water use for reindeer.

Expert consultations have revealed limited compatibility between sectoral forest and biodiversity restoration-related policy goals in Sweden. Particularly, the sustainable development and environmental protection goals outlined in the **Swedish Environmental Code** appear to partially contradict the production and sustainable yield-focused objectives of the **Swedish Forestry Act**.

Table 1: Key forest restoration policies and legislation in Sweden.

Name	Year of adoption	Entry into force	URL
Swedish Forestry Act 1993 (Skogsvårdslag)	1993	1993	<a href="https://www.skogsstyrelsen.se/en/laws-and-regulations/skogsvardslagen/">https://www.skogsstyrelsen.se/en/laws-and-regulations/skogsvardslagen/</a>
Swedish Environmental Code (Miljöbalk)	1998	1999	<a href="http://www.government.se/legal-documents/2000/08/ds-200061/">http://www.government.se/legal-documents/2000/08/ds-200061/</a>
Reindeer Husbandry Act (SFS 1993:3) (last amended 2018)	1971	1971	<a href="https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/rennaringslag-1971437_sfs-1971-437">https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/rennaringslag-1971437_sfs-1971-437</a>
Heritage Conservation Act (1988:950)		1988	<a href="https://svenskforsattningssamling.se/">https://svenskforsattningssamling.se/</a>



# VERTICAL FOREST RESTORATION POLICY COHERENCE

The Swedish Forest Law contains several provisions that explicitly and implicitly regulate the protection of forest areas, including forest set-asides. Section 4 § explicitly refers to the Miljöbalken (Environmental Code), which addresses the protection of areas designated under Natura 2000. Sections 15 §, 16 §, 17 §, and 18 § regulate logging in mountain forests and prohibit it if it significantly affects nature conservation, thereby reinforcing the strict protection of sensitive forest areas. Section 25 § explicitly mandates that broadleaf forests must remain as such, ensuring their preservation. Finally, Section 27 § requires permits before logging in these forests and ensures that conservation interests are considered, thereby demonstrating explicit protection measures.

The Swedish Forest Law includes several provisions that implicitly support uneven-aged and mixed-species forest management. Article 6 b § prohibits the use of alien tree species in mountain forests, ensuring the focus on native species, which can promote diversity among native species. Articles 22 § and 23 § define and regulate broadleaf forests, requiring a specific composition of native deciduous species, ensuring mixed-species management. Additionally, Article 11 § promotes an even-aged distribution in forests by limiting the proportion of land that can be harvested at once, indirectly supporting uneven-aged forest management. Articles 7 § and 10 § further reinforce these practices by allowing the government to regulate the use of forest reproductive material and ensure felling promotes forest development and protects young forests, thereby facilitating mixed-species and uneven-aged growth. Articles 25 § and 27 § emphasize the maintenance and regeneration of broadleaf forests after felling, requiring that no actions be taken that result in a reduction of broadleaf species.

The Swedish Forest Law implicitly promotes deadwood management through Article 30 §, which grants the government or designated authority the power to establish regulations concerning nature conservation and cultural heritage in forest management. This includes provisions on the retention of trees and tree collections, which can ultimately turn into standing or lying deadwood.

In the Swedish Forest Law and Swedish forestry practice, clearcutting is commonly referred to as 'regeneration felling' or 'rejuvenation felling'. There is no general clearcut ban in the Swedish Forest Law, nor are there any restrictions on the size of final fellings, clearcuts, and regeneration areas, especially in lowland areas. However, for productive and broadleaved

forests, a notification for final clearcut felling exceeding 0.5 ha must be submitted to the Swedish Forest Agency six weeks in advance. The same applies to felling for purposes other than timber production. Following a court decision in 2020, forest owners are entitled to 125% financial compensation if harvesting is denied.

Harvesting in unproductive forest is prohibited. Furthermore, for mountain forests in alpine areas the maximum permitted clearcut size is 20 ha and forest users must apply for a permit to make a final felling. Rejuvenation felling must not be done before the forest has reached a certain age: the so-called minimum final felling age. For stands dominated by conifers, the minimum age allowed varies between 45 and 100 years, depending on the soil's production capacity. The earliest at which beech may be rejuvenated is 80 years, whilst for oak it is 90 years. Forest stands whose timber stock consists of at least 50% birch, aspen or alder may be felled at 35 years of age.

For management units larger than 50 ha there is a limit on the forest that can be felled for rejuvenation. On units with up to 100 ha, the area of bare land and forest younger than 20 years may not exceed 50 ha. On units larger than 100 ha, up to half of the forest land may consist of bare land and forest that is younger than 20 years. Additional rules apply to management units larger than 1 000 ha. Where reindeer husbandry is practiced or forest roads are built, final felling of forest lands may be conducted, providing it accounts for reindeer husbandry by adapting felling size and position when needed. The Swedish Forest Law and applicable Government Ordinances require that forestlands be reforested within three years after the year of final cutting.

No direct provisions related to forest birds' management were identified in the Swedish Forest Law.



# KEY FINDINGS

Swedish forest restoration legislation addresses key aspects that could support the implementation of forest restoration activities. However, the relatively lenient regulations surrounding large-scale clearcutting practices may present a significant barrier to effective restoration efforts. This could hinder progress toward key forest restoration goals outlined in the EU Nature Restoration Law (EU-NRL), such as increasing the share of mixed and uneven-aged forests and enhancing forest connectivity.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

For successful implementation and scaling of forest restoration, it will be crucial to leverage synergies across forest-related policy areas while addressing critical trade-offs. This can be achieved, for example, by better harmonizing economic interests with nature conservation goals and requirements.



# REFERENCES

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