

Key Biotopes, Registration and Disputes in the Swedish Forest

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SUMMARY

The objective of this paper is to describe land use claims, conflicts of interests and legal processes concerning the Swedish forests and the registration of certain areas of high ecological value.

The Swedish Forestry Agency has since the mid-1990s inventoried natural values in the forest and registered areas that constitute so-called Key Biotopes. These are areas which - from an overall assessment of the biotope's structure, species content, history and physical environment - have significant value for the forest's flora and fauna and where red list species are or can be expected to be present. This geospatial data has been accessible for multiple actors in the environmental and forestry sectors, as well as to the public.

Sweden consists of approximately 40 million hectares of land, of which approximately 1/3 is forest land. The forest industry is significant, and Sweden was the world's fourth largest exporter in the year 2020 of pulp, paper, and partially refined wood products. Over 60 % of the productive Swedish forest land area is certified according to the voluntary, market-based systems FSC (Forest Stewardship council) or PEFC (Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification Schemes). According to both FSC and PEFC, forestry measures are completely or partially prohibited in areas classified as Key Biotopes.

Although the registration of Key Biotopes has never had this stated purpose, in practice the registration has meant that a landowner can no longer sell timber from this area to certified timber buyers. A number of landowners have therefore brought legal proceedings against the Forestry Agency to get them to stop key biotope registration and to delete existing data. In several cases, the landowners have also been successful. The Forestry Agency completely stopped registering Key Biotopes in December

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In this paper the result of the legal proceedings is described in context of Swedish forest policy. The findings indicate that policy makers will have to balance conflicts between economic and ecological interests in a delicate way henceforth, regarding the Swedish forests.

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