

# REWETTING PEATLANDS IN FINLAND

**Policy insights from the Ylpässuo mire  
for scaling peatland restoration**



# CONTEXT AND CURRENT POLICY LANDSCAPE

**F**inland has a strong framework for wetland restoration through the **Helmi Habitats Programme**, led by the Ministry of the Environment. The programme coordinates the protection, restoration, and management of mires, wetlands, aquatic bird habitats, coastal ar-

eas, and forests. Helmi combines national coordination with local implementation, working closely with landowners, municipalities, and regional actors.

Finland has set ambitious targets to 2030, including protecting 60,000 hectares of mires and restoring a

similar area across both protected and commercially used land. Wetland restoration also contributes to obligations under the Birds Directive. However, forestry and agricultural practices remain a challenge, as large areas of peatland were historically drained for timber production.

## WHY IS RESTORATION HARD TO SCALE?

### Barriers to effective wetland restoration

#### Commercial forestry pressures

Continued drainage and timber production hinder peatland recovery.

#### Insufficient political commitment and funding

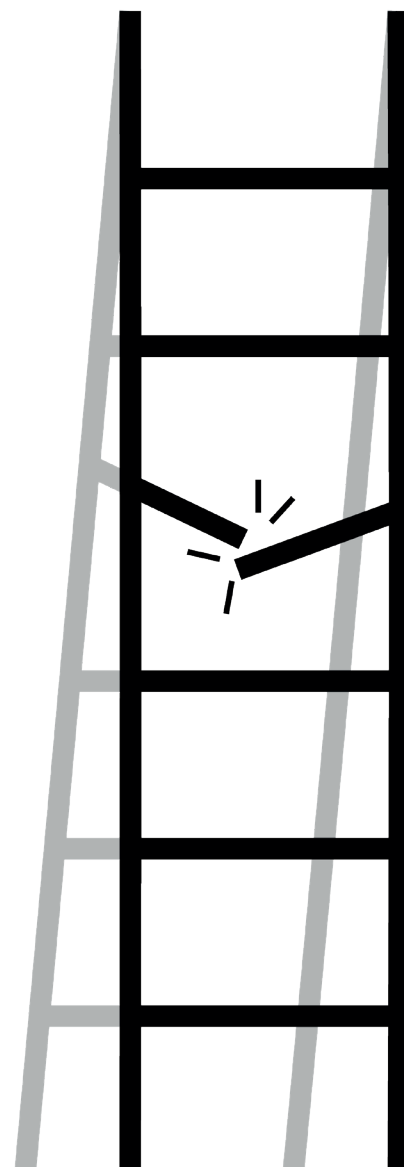
Support for biodiversity exists but is not matched by funding and implementation.

#### Weakened policy targets

Recent biodiversity strategies have removed quantitative protection targets.

#### Slow implementation of the EU Nature Restoration Regulation

Delays at EU level risk slowing national action.



# PRIORITY POLICY MEASURES

## Combining active and passive restoration

### ACTIVE RESTORATION

#### Restoring hydrology in drained peatlands

In drained peatland forests, recovery often requires intervention. Ditches must be blocked or filled to raise water tables and restore natural hydrology. Strong public support for landowners is essential. Earlier policies subsidised drainage; comparable incentives are now needed for restoration, particularly in biodiversity-rich areas. At the same time, stronger regulation is required to prevent continued drainage and further degradation.

### PASSIVE RESTORATION

#### Allowing nature to recover

In less intensively used areas where drainage has ceased, natural recovery can occur without major intervention. Protecting these sites allows hydrology, biodiversity, and carbon storage functions to recover over time. This low-cost approach is well suited to Finland's landscapes and can be applied across large areas.

## EVIDENCE FROM PRACTICE

### Ylpässuo mire: recovery through protection

**M**onitoring Ylpässuo mire showed how passive restoration can support ecosystem recovery. Although no active restoration measures have been implemented, drainage in surrounding forests is no longer maintained, allowing water tables to rise and natural peatland processes to gradually re-establish.

#### Biodiversity benefits

- Provides habitat for numerous species recorded in national biodiversity databases.
- Creates conditions for the gradual recovery of peatland biodiversity.

#### Climate benefits

- Functions as a carbon sink during the growing season.
- Limited winter measurements prevent a complete assessment of annual methane emissions, underlining the importance of year-round monitoring.

**Passive restoration through protection offers a cost-effective approach that could be applied across extensive peatland areas, particularly in sparsely populated regions**



# HOW TO SCALE UP WETLAND RESTORATION

- Expand peatland protection and prohibit drainage of remaining natural wetlands.
- Provide financial incentives for landowners to restore drained peatlands, particularly through ditch blocking.
- Better integrate carbon storage and biodiversity values into land-use decisions and incentive schemes.
- Expand the Helmi restoration cluster approach to maximise ecological impact.
- Invest in long-term hydrological and greenhouse gas monitoring.

## GOVERNANCE AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

**T**he Finnish experience shows that preventing further degradation can be as important as active restoration. Expanding protection, ending drainage practices, and supporting landowners financially are critical for scaling up peatland recovery.

## KEY RECOMMENDATION



**Prioritise large-scale peatland protection, prohibit further drainage, and provide financial incentives for landowners to restore drained areas, supported by long-term monitoring to guide policy and management.**



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