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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee
45th meeting
Strasbourg, 8-12 December 2025

Bureau of the Standing Committee
16-18 September 2025
Strasbourg

**Recommendation No.190 (2016) on the conservation of
natural habitats and wildlife, especially birds, in afforestation
of lowland in Iceland**

- REPORT BY THE GOVERNMENT -

*Document prepared by the Ministry of Environment,
Energy and Climate, Government of Iceland*



Recommendation No. 190 (2016) 2016, on the conservation of natural habitats and wildlife, specially birds, in afforestation of lowland in Iceland

Update report

This report will inform of any status updates since summer 2023. Added information is in blue below the text previously updated on. If blue text has not been added to a sub-recommendation, the status of that respective recommendation has not changed since 2023.

1. Develop a schedule and clear programme of work to implement the recommendations in this report.

In August 2022, the minister for food, agriculture and fisheries published the first combined strategy for land reclamation and forestry as well as an action plan.

The strategy is prepared according to laws on land reclamation, as well as on forests and forestry.

[The Action Plan](#) touches on recommendations in Recommendation no. 190.

2. Finalise and activate as soon as possible the proposed contract between the Environment Ministry and IINH for a project supporting the implementation of AEWA;

This contract has not been finalized.

3. Accelerate significantly Iceland's work towards its contribution to the international Emerald Network of sites

In December 2021 Iceland proposed five sites to the Emerald Network. In June 2022, a biogeographical seminar was held in Iceland. At the 42nd meeting of the Standing Committee in December 2022, the five sites were listed as candidate sites.

4. Implement urgently the provisions in the 2006 legislation for Strategic Environmental Assessment of regional afforestation programmes, and of those Municipal plans that cover areas of importance for waterbirds. Undertake the SEA of national forestry policy as originally recommended under the Bern Convention in 2002;

In 2021 Parliament passed a revised act on Environmental Impact assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment. This does not change much with regards to forestry.

It must be noted that the regional afforestation programs were abolished as such in 2019 and are now part of the Forestry Service.

5. Develop a national indicative forestry strategy in the short term, for full implementation over the longer term.

In the year 2022 the minister for food, agriculture and fisheries, issued a 10-year national strategy for combined forestry and land restoration. The strategy includes a five-year action plan.

The vision and focus of the strategy are:

- The state of ecosystems and their biodiversity is consistent with ecosystem potential.
- The utilisation of forests, wetlands and other ecosystems is sustainable and they have a strong resistance to natural crises and other disturbances.
- The country's ecosystems store rich amounts of carbon in soil and vegetation and play a key role in the carbon balance.
- Increased land quality in forests and thriving ecosystems support improved quality of life, public health and improves communities' resilience to environmental change.
- The land supports diverse business activities and sustainable development of settlements across the country.

The Land Reclamation and Forestry Action Plan covers 2022-2026 and therefore shapes priorities for government action in the coming years. Defined measures include research on the impacts of land reclamation, forestry and recovery of wetlands on biodiversity, creating new quality criteria for land selection for forestry, and an assessment of the carbon balance for climate emissions accounting. Direct actions mainly involve restoring ecosystems on degraded land, restoration of wetlands, restoration of natural forests and forestry.

Regional plans are in the making, based on The Land Reclamation and Forestry Action Plan in close collaboration with municipalities. These plans will also be based on the best data available on biodiversity, habitat types and nature conservation areas. The municipalities will take this into consideration in their planning processes, which are legally defined.

The IINH maps for habitat types have proven useful on large scale. However, these maps have proven to be too inaccurate for planning land use on smaller scale, like for individual projects, although the data can give some broad indication on the habitat types in each site.

6. **As part of the IINH work, support the implementation of AEWa in Iceland (see point 2), develop and launch with effect from 2017 an appropriately resourced country-wide scheme for long-term monitoring of waterbirds and their habitats, to:**
 - i. **be capable inter alia of detecting changes caused by forestry, and**
 - ii. **be used inter alia to help inform judgements about forestry development, by reference to the national and international context relating for example to bird distribution, habitat use and the status and trends of populations;**

See answer to point 2.

7. **Continue to give priority to the screening of afforestation proposals to determine the need for Environmental Impact Assessment according to case-specific judgements concerning the risk of effects on significant ecological values, rather than according to an arbitrary size threshold. Support these decisions with guidelines on factors likely to contribute to such effects (including those that may contribute indirectly, cumulatively and synergistically), and take a precautionary approach where there is uncertainty. Undertake “Class A” assessments under the EIA legislation wherever the circumstances warrant it;**

The screening of afforestation proposals is in accordance with the EIA act and any afforestation project must go through a screening by the relevant municipality and a development permit to be issued. This is all in accordance with law.

Land and Forest Iceland has developed quality criteria for land selection for forestry. The criteria have recently gone through consultation process at the institutional level and are currently under review at The Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Climate.

- 8. Make full use of the opportunity provided by the negotiation of individual planting agreements with landowners to provide advice and attach appropriate conditions to any grant aid, in order to safeguard (and where applicable enhance) important ecological values. Develop effective collaboration between IINH and the Forestry Service, to provide an evidence based approach to support locational guidance for forest planting in future; and to build up relevant knowledge and capacities across government; T-PVS (2016)**

The new agency, Land and Forest is responsible for advising landowners, based on the best information available, including data produced by the IINH. The IINH may review individual afforestation plans.

- 9. Undertake a review of existing formalised systems for liaison, consultation and equitable input to decision-making in planning and management of forestry across the various departments and agencies responsible for forestry, planning, environmental protection and climate change policy; and define specific steps for improving coordination and the coherence of action. Address explicitly as part of this review the supportive role of NGOs, academic experts and civil society;**

These processes are reviewed on regular basis. By adopting in law the issuance of national and regional plans for forestry an inclusive and broad review process is included.

- 10. Update Iceland's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, incorporating provisions relating to forestry policy and migratory waterbirds that reflect the recommendations made in the joint AEWA/Bern Convention mission report, and setting out a timeline for the future implementation of actions, accompanied by the necessary resourcing commitments;**

Authorities have recently introduced a Green Book which contains information on the state of biodiversity in Icelandic ecosystems. The Green Book is a step towards a national biodiversity strategy which plans are to start developing in cooperation with relevant stakeholders coming autumn.

Following the work on the Greenbook, a steering committee was appointed in 2024 by the then Minister for the Environment, Energy and Climate to continue the work and issue a draft white paper on Iceland's biodiversity policy.

The white paper, which is currently presented for public consultation, serves as the foundation for an action plan that will be developed following the completion of the white paper. The white paper was prepared in consultation with other ministries, agencies, industry, civil society organizations and the public. This consultation was used in the development of the policy.

The purpose of the policy can be summarized in one main goal: To strengthen the position of biodiversity across all levels of governance and throughout society. The policy brings together objectives across thematic areas and groups them into six guiding principles, providing a cross-sectoral perspective on the role of biodiversity in various fields. These are:

- A) A strong position for biodiversity within the governance system,
- B) Protection and restoration of ecosystems and species,
- C) Sustainable land use and resource utilisation in harmony with biodiversity,
- D) Invasive alien species, pollution and climate change,
- E) Biodiversity for society, and
- F) Knowledge as the foundation for success.

- 11. Give priority in future environmental research projects and programmes to gathering better Iceland-specific evidence on the ecological mechanisms by which afforestation may impact upon birds and other biodiversity. This should give particular attention to effects that may be**

secondary, cumulative, synergistic, indirect or “edge”-related, as well as any complicating factors associated with climate change. Make the findings available to all concerned, and use the resulting knowledge fully in EIA screening processes, good practice guidance and advice on e.g. buffer distances, mitigation measures and options for habitat restoration;

This is included in the Land and life action plan. A research is ongoing which addresses the impact from afforestation on biodiversity, including birdlife.

12. Update and expand existing guidance on good environmental practice in afforestation, to include (for example):

- i. the Bern Convention’s draft Code of Conduct on plantation forestry and invasive alien trees, when adopted,**
- ii. more advice (especially to help municipalities) on EIA and planning decisions,**
- iii. updated information on the location of sensitive habitats and important sites,**
- iv. avoidance of sites that support important bird populations (irrespective of habitat quality), and**
- v. setting back plantation boundaries to provide buffer zones for reducing “edge effects” on wetlands;**

It is included in the Land life action plan to update existing guidance on good environmental practice in afforestation. A draft is being reviewed in the ministry.

13. Given the need, as part of wider ecosystem management, to maintain and restore wetland values and services, as articulated in the Terms of Reference for the Mission; then explore the scope and possibilities for introducing State-funded “positive” financial incentives for land management in favour of nature conservation. This should be informed by research on trends in uptake of existing forms of support and on landowner perspectives concerning the future;

Included in the Land and life action plan is the review of support to farmers and other landowners for afforestation and ecosystem restoration. [Different agencies and the Agriculture Advisory service have been working for some time developing a program for farmers, including training and advice on different aspects of land use. The aim is to build on this work further.](#)

14. Keep the Standing Committee regularly informed about the progress in the implementation of this Recommendation.