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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

41st meeting
Strasbourg, 29 November – 3 December 2021

Follow-up to Recommendation No.190 (2016)

**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 for the Environment and Natural Resources of Iceland*

- November 2021 -

Update of 2.11.2021 specific to recommendation no. 5 in Recommendation No. 190 (2016):

(i) have the aim of meeting current afforestation targets while minimizing negative effects on species or habitats of conservation importance (including both intact and modified wetlands),

Answer: The draft NFP includes the sentence: Wetlands should not be drained for afforestation and natural woodlands should not be used for forestry with other species.

(ii) use the most recent IINH maps and other data, including waterbird and wetland distribution data and the identified ASCIs, to identify zones of different degrees of presumption for and against planting,

Answer: The draft NFP does not go into such detail. Its purpose is to set general goals in forestry. Selecting land for afforestation is done at lower planning levels. The draft NFP does include the following goals in that respect: In selecting land for afforestation, it is important to recognize environmental and social values in the proposed afforestation areas that might be affected by afforestation. Those values should be compared to expected environmental, social, and economic benefits of afforestation. The result should then be part of the application for planning permission at the local level.

(iii) be linked to the tiered system of decision making set out in Iceland's Environmental Impact Assessment legislation, and

Answer: A tiered decision-making system is built into the draft NFP, with local municipalities involved in the process of eventual site selection for afforestation (see above). Municipalities have all the tools they need, according to the Planning Act, to protect important nature conservation areas without them necessarily being officially designated at the national level.

(iv) be guided by the conservation priorities and good practice standards referred to in the present report

Answer: The draft NFP includes this goal: Forests should promote increased biodiversity and good status of other environmental values. This goal includes all forests and involves selection of land for afforestation. Environmental benefits of multiple use forests and forestry can be reached in a variety of ways, for example through good forest management practices, the right species selection, creation of glades, regeneration method sand other diverse methods. The draft NFP also includes the goal of: Renewing the current best practices guidelines within the next five years.

The Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources hopes this update-report gives the Standing Committee information on how Iceland has reacted to recommendations made in Recommendation No. 190 (2016).

- August 2021 -

Recommendation No. 190 (2016)

-On the conservation of natural habitats and wildlife, specially birds, in afforestation of lowland in Iceland

Update Report

November 18th 2016, the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention adopted Recommendation no. 190 on the conservation of natural habitats and wildlife, specially birds, in afforestation of lowland in Iceland.

The Recommendation contains 14 recommendations which include various steps to be fulfilled by the contracting party.

The Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) welcomes recommendations from the Standing Committee on how to conserve natural habitats and wildlife in Iceland. However, ENR finds the recommendations somewhat lacking in clear and constructive guidance due to the number of recommendations, as well as the manifold suggestions in each of the numbered recommendations.

ENR has taken various steps towards conserving natural habitats and wildlife in Iceland, including areas of afforestation on lowlands. These steps have been taken in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, and as mentioned in Birdlife Iceland's letter, dated June 11th, 2021, there has been considerable progress in line with the AEWA/Bern mission report.

Considering that, rather than attempting to address each recommendation, ENR will give a brief report on actions taken by the ministry in cooperation with various stakeholders, that have had an impact/will have an impact on the topics addressed by Recommendation No. 190.

A new bill on forestry

In 2019 a bill on forestry was approved by the Icelandic Parliament. The bill replaces an older bill from 1955. The bill (Act on Forestry no. 2019/33) sets out goals that reflect the changes that have taken place in forestry in recent decades. Restoration of biological diversity, protection and increased cover of natural forests and cooperation with stakeholders are among many objectives of the new act.

Increase in forestry-based actions

Following the new act on forestry, budget to forestry projects has increased, mainly based on the national climate action plan. In line with the act, emphasis has been placed on projects that focus on natural forest distribution and restoration, strengthening biological diversity, and take into consideration the protection of fauna, flora, and natural habitats. Afforestation projects have also increased.

Increase in land restoration projects

Various land restoration projects with emphasis on natural forests, grasslands, and wetlands - have been financed by ENR. Currently the ministry is working on reviewing policy on state support for restoration and other land-based initiatives including preserving and enhancing biodiversity.

Increased monitoring

For the past two years the practice of monitoring at protected areas has been under review by the ministry and its respective institutions (Institution of Natural History and regional Nature Research Centers). In 2020 an organized monitoring program started at dozens of protected areas, many being important bird habitats. This will strengthen the knowledge base on the status of many bird populations.

Plans for forestry and land restoration

The process of developing a Nation-Wide Forestry Plan (NWFP) and a Nation-Wide Land Restoration Plan (NWLRP) is underway. Steering committees were appointed for both plans. The committees include members of relevant agencies and individuals with diverse backgrounds. The plans have gone through a public consultation process and strategic environmental assessment. Following the consultation process the ministry has instructed the steering committees to finalize the draft plans, as well as adding an appendix to their report where reactions to comments from the consultation process are explained. The ministry will then review the plans considering consistency with current public policy and terms of reference and make suggestions of amendments if necessary.

The Emerald Network

In September 2021 Iceland will start the process of proposing sites to Emerald Network (EN). By doing so, the chosen sites, if adopted as EN sites, will contribute to the ecological network of areas with special conservation interest.

The Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources hopes this update-report gives the Standing Committee information on how Iceland has reacted to recommendations made in Recommendation No. 190 (2016).