WOODMEADOWLIFE

„Restoring and promoting a long term sustainable management of Fennoscandian wooded meadows in Estonia and Latvia“

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Deliverable action E5

Report on Unesco compliance

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Estonian wooded meadows have been inscribed to the UNESCO World Heritage tentative list since 2004. Since then many actions have taken place to protect, maintain and raise awareness on the values of the meadows in Estonia and among the international expert community. However, since 2004 limited if no steps have been taken to advance the ambition to promote these unique biotopes on a global level. The aim of the current activity is to update the requirements for the nominations to the World Heritage List; the relevance and actuality of the nomination.

The Woodmeadowlife project has supported the maintenance, safekeeping and awareness of the values, authenticity and integrity of wooded meadows. Potential UNESCO nomination strengthens the sustainability and continuity of the achievements of the project.

The report is the basis to draft the preliminary assessment for the nomination.

The World Heritage Convention

The Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted in 1972, is the most popular international convention, signed by 198 countries. The convention links together in a single document the concepts of nature conservation and the preservation of cultural properties. The Convention recognizes the way in which people interact with nature, and the fundamental need to preserve the balance between the two. The convention encourages states to protect their heritage and nature. The most important output of the convention is the World Heritage List. From 1978 to 2025 there are 972 cultural, 235 natural and 41 mixed sites nominated to the World Heritage List from 170 states. Estonia has two sites – Tallinn Old Town (1997) and Struve Geodetic Arc (2005), the latter as part of a cross-border site of 10 countries. To plan new nominations there is a Tentative List. In the Tentative list Estonia has three sites – Kuressaare Fortress (2002), the Baltic Klint (2004) and Wooded Meadows (2004).

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The aim of the current activity is to update the requirements for the nominations to the World Heritage List; the relevance and actuality of the nomination. The process of the nomination has to follow the timeframe foreseen by UNESCO (see appendix 1) and therefore it is impossible to reach the final goal during the timeframe of the project. Therefore the task of EKA was to (re)start the discussions with UNESCO Estonia National Commission, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Culture, Environmental Board and the governmental, non-governmental and municipal institutions that take care of wooded meadows. Simultaneously the consultations with international institutions and relevant partners were opened.

EKAs role is to assist the potential drafting of the nomination dossier providing background, initiating discussions on mandatory elements of the dossier. However, EKA can not lead the nomination process as this is the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Climate and Ministry of Culture as the representatives of the State Party for the UNESCO convention.

Estonia has an experience as a member of the World Heritage Committee (2009-2013), many of the members of that delegation are working in EKA and a few others are involved in the current nominating process. Estonia has gained experience also through the work in the Advisory Bodies.

The process

To achieve the goal, EKA has studied the documents of the tentative list nomination file, made presentations on UNESCO WH policy, organised seminars and discussions, contacted and negotiated with relevant experts and institutions.

The main events

- May 2022 Meeting with Pärandkoosluste Ühing
- June 2023 Presentation and discussion at the Wooded Meadows Summer School in Abruka
- Jan 2024 Student debate to discuss the peculiarities of mixed properties in the World Heritage List
- June 2024 Participation at the study tour on comparative analysis to Gotland
- Sept 2024 UNESCO Compliance seminar part I in EKA
- Jan 2025 Student debate to discuss the peculiarities of mixed properties in the World Heritage List
- Apr 2025 UNESCO Compliance seminar part II in Kõue Manor
- Apr 2025 presentation to the teachers of biology and nature sciences
- May 2025 Meetings with the Ministry of Environment and Environmental Board and representatives of IUCN.
- June 2025 Presentation to general audience in Luhtre
- Sept 2025 consultations for the preparations for the application for preliminary assessment request (delivered by the Ministry of Climate to UNESCO in Sept)
- Nov 2025 consultations with IUCN and ICOMOS.
- Dec 2025 Student debate to discuss the peculiarities of mixed properties in the World Heritage List
- March-April 2026 UNESCO Compliance student workshop in Käru.

As indicated above the preparation of the report has consisted of several steps. The students of EKA have researched and discussed the comparative nominations and their nomination as well state of conservation reports.

These discussions have provided data for EKA's presentations to partners to explain the World Heritage nomination processes, expectations and tendencies to project partners in different meetings. Two major seminars on UNESCO compliance took place in EKA (Sept 2024) with partners (10 participants from EKA, the Environmental Board, Ministry of Environment, UNESCO National Commission, Tartu University, Pärandkoosluste Ühing, Tallinn Botanical Garden) and Kõue (Apr 2025) with partners and students (above mentioned and students of cultural heritage and conservation, altogether 22 participants). The aim of these meetings was to discuss the UNESCO compliance of the wooded meadows; the potential international partnership; the strategy and challenges; the aim and content of the potential nomination and to agree on task division.

General background

EKA has followed the tendencies and challenges in the World Heritage system through annual seminars on World Heritage nominations and State of Conservation Reports, as well as the critical reflections towards the World Heritage concept.

Since the 2010s the World Heritage system has been challenged by politicisation. The main reason for this is the commercialisation of World Heritage Sites as the label is a foster of tourism and tourism-related businesses that makes the nomination not only the ambition to present national values but an economic ambition. The threats to the cultural heritage are often more visible and include highrises, uncontrolled development, mining etc. The most invasive threats to the nature sites are disasters, pollution, over-exploitation and mining. Like all heritage types, the World Heritage is sensitive to the changes created by climate change, disasters, conflicts and wars. The mechanism to draw global attention to the endangered sites is the World Heritage List in Danger. The biggest threat however is the bad management of the sites.

To address the threats and improve the credibility of the World Heritage List as best practice of protection, the process of nomination has become more complex in recent years. For example the process of preliminary assessment has been added. The aim of the preliminary assessment is to allocate time for State Parties to better prepare the nomination and through the consultation processes with World Heritage Convention Advisory Bodies (ICOMOS, IUCN, ICCROM) to improve not only the quality of the nomination dossier but better protect the potential World Heritage Site. In recent years also special evaluation is carried out on the legal aspects and human rights approaches to supervise the respect for the local communities and free and prior consent in nominating and managing the properties.

Also the system of monitoring of the already listed sites has become more complex and the requirements for management more strict.

The mandatory components and the procedure of the World Heritage nominations are listed in the UNESCO/ICCROM/ICOMOS/IUCN manual "Preparing World Heritage Nominations" (Second edition, 2011) Published in November 2011 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, available https://whc.unesco.org/en/preparing-world-heritage-nominations/

UNESCO Compliance

Defining and understanding the property

To be included to the list the nominated sites need to demonstrate the Outstanding Universal Value, and the justification of the compliance to criteria. The nomination file needs to demonstrate the strategic objectives of UNESCO:

- Credibility. Strengthen the Credibility of the World Heritage List, as a representative and geographically balanced testimony of cultural and natural properties of outstanding universal value.
- Conservation. Ensure the effective Conservation of World Heritage properties.
- Capacity building. Promote the development of effective Capacity-building measures, including assistance for preparing the nomination of properties to the World Heritage

List, for the understanding and implementation of the World Heritage Convention and related instruments.
- Communication. Increase public awareness, involvement and support for World Heritage through communication.
- Communities. Enhance the role of communities in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention.

To demonstrate these objectives, the nomination file needs to encompass the comparative analysis with similar sites, the comprehensive overview of the state of conservation, preservation and maintenance as well the involvement of communities. The task of EKA in this process is to activate the discussions with responsible authorities and experts. The concept of the book on wooded meadows compiled and edited by EKA supports the efforts to collect relevant qualitative data necessary for the nomination.

Description of the site.

The current proposal is a serial nomination of seven meadows Laelatu, Kalli-Nedrema, Laasma, Tagamõisa, Loode, Koiva, Halliste. There has been a correction to the original file following the current state of wooded meadows.

EKA has proposed to discuss if there is a potential for a serial nomination with Latvia, Sweden and Finland. At the moment these negotiations are ongoing.

The planned nomination follows the conditions of the Operational Guidelines: Serial properties are a series of individual or discrete components / areas which are not contained within a single boundary. Components may be quite close or geographically remote, but all components are within a single country. Serial properties will include two or more component parts related by clearly defined links: a) Component parts should reflect cultural, social or functional links over time that provide, where relevant, landscape, ecological, evolutionary or habitat connectivity. b) Each component part should contribute to the Outstanding Universal Value of the property as a whole in a substantial, scientific, readily defined and discernible way, and may include, amongst other things, intangible attributes. The resulting Outstanding Universal Value should be easily understood and communicated. c) Consistently, and in order to avoid an excessive fragmentation of component parts, the process of nomination of the property, including the selection of the component parts, should take fully into account the overall manageability and coherence of the property. and provided it is the series as a whole – and not necessarily the individual parts of it – which are of Outstanding Universal Value. (Operational Guidelines, Paragraph 137)

The boundaries of the elements of the wooded meadows nomination are defined according to the value and state of conservation of the site. In general the areas are easily defined by natural borders between different natural habitats or roads.

Every World Heritage property needs protection and management arrangements for activities outside the property, including their immediate setting. Buffer zones are one commonly used means to achieve this protection, conservation and management. However a buffer zone is not

always a requirement if, as outlined in the Operational Guidelines, there are also legal, regulatory and other methods available to protect the property from wider threats (Paragraph 104). The buffer zones are clearly delineated area(s) outside a World Heritage property and adjacent to its boundaries which contribute to the protection, conservation, management, integrity, authenticity and sustainability of the Outstanding Universal Value of the property. Although buffer zones are not regarded as part of the inscribed property, their boundaries and relevant management approaches should be evaluated, approved and formally recorded at the time they are proposed by a State Party. Where buffer zones are defined, they should be seen as an integral component of the State Party's commitment to the protection, conservation and management of the World Heritage property. The functions of the buffer zone should reflect the different types and levels of protection, conservation and management needed to protect the attributes that sustain the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage property.

In the case of wooded meadows, there is no direct need for buffer zones as they are situated in the peripheral areas without intrusive factors nearby.

Outstanding Universal Value

The World Heritage Convention was established to recognize 'sites of Outstanding Universal Value' which are part of the heritage of humankind as a whole, which deserve protection and transmission to future generations, and which are important for the whole of humanity. World Heritage Operational Guidelines define Outstanding Universal Value as being of cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity (Paragraph 49). This definition is understood through the criteria for the inscription of properties on the World Heritage List. To be deemed of Outstanding Universal Value, a property must also meet the conditions of integrity and/or authenticity and must have an adequate protection and management system to ensure its safeguarding (Operational Guidelines, Paragraph 78, see also sections on integrity and authenticity in Section II.E). Outstanding Universal Value is:

• the main focus of the nomination;

• what is evaluated;

• why a property is inscribed on the World Heritage List; and

• what needs to be sustained through protection, conservation and management.

The Outstanding Universal Value is expressed by attributes that can be tangible or intangible. It is essential that the attributes identified for a property should flow from the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value and the justification for the criteria. Attributes must be identified as they are vital to understanding authenticity and integrity, and are the focus of protection, conservation and management. For natural properties, it is more common to speak of 'features', although the word attributes is sometimes used. Examples of attributes for natural properties could include visual or aesthetic significance; scale of the extent of physical features or natural habitats; intactness of physical or ecological processes; naturalness, and intactness of natural systems; viability of populations of rare species; and rarity.

Selection criteria

To be included on the World Heritage List, sites must be of outstanding universal value and meet at least one out of ten selection criteria. The outstanding universal value lies mainly in the exemplary richness of species, the most important criteria are among the natural (VII-X) ones. However, as the specific biotopes develop through human interference, the tradition of hay making is still alive and important in Estonian traditions, also cultural criteria need to be considered (I-VI). Since 1992 significant interactions between people and the natural environment have been recognized as cultural landscapes. Wooded meadows qualify into the third category of cultural landscapes – they have survived only due to certain connections between culture and nature.

(i) *to represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;* - Not applicable

(ii) *to exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;* - Not applicable

(iii) t*o bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;* - Not applicable

(iv) *to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;* - Not applicable

(v) *to be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;* – Wooded meadows are one of the few exceptions where biodiversity has grown as a result of human activities.

(vi) *to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria);* - Not applicable

(vii) *to contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance;* – Wooded meadows are aesthetically very valuable. They distinguish. from other agricultural ecosystems because of the changing gradient from groups of trees and bushes to treeless patches. The presence of fascinating old trees (e.g. oaks) is characteristic of wooded meadows. The resulting heterogeneity of growing conditions and regular mowing are the basis of the unusually high species richness that certainly increases the aesthetic value of wooded meadows. In some sense, as for the appearance and ecological conditions, wooded meadows can be compared to parks - the biggest differences lie in the age and origin.

(viii)

to be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features; – It is presumed that half-opened communities reminding of wooded meadows evolved already millions of years ago between a number of ice ages while large herbivores were feeding on them and this way creating illuminated grassland patches in the forest ecosystems. In evolutionary terms, these were the times when the development of species adapted to this kind of ecological conditions took place. After the last Ice Age wild herbivores were replaced by animal husbandry - extensive animal keeping was the reason for the regeneration of opened and half-opened landscapes in the forest zone.

(ix) *to be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals;* –In the world context, the biodiversity of wooded meadows is remarkable. The small-scale species richness (plants) of wooded meadows is the highest in the forest zone. For instance, the greatest plant species density was described on Laelatu wooded meadows in Matsalu Nature Reserve - 76 species per one square meter - the number that can be compared only to the species richness of some alpine meadows and steppes. There are several reasons for the unusually high diversity: high number of species adapted to the certain ecological conditions of wooded meadows

(x) to contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.

Comparative analysis

The comparative analysis explains the importance of the nominated property both in its national and international context. In order to do this, the property should be compared with similar properties, whether on the World Heritage List or not. The comparison should outline the similarities the nominated property has with other properties and the reasons that make the nominated property stand out.

The comparative analysis should be carried out with comparable sites in the List, in the Tentative list and similar biotope areas. Among 41 listed mixed properties only Laponian Area (774, 1996), carries some similarities. More similar properties can be found among the sites listed only on natural criteria like

Out of listed sites, attention should be given for example to Žatec and the Landscape of Saaz Hops (1558, 2023) in Czech Republic; The par force hunting landscape in North Zealand (1469, 2015) in Denmark; Agricultural Landscape of Southern Öland (968, 2000) from Sweden and frm the Tentative List Alpine and pre-alpine meadow and marsh landscapes (historic anthropogenic landscapes in the area of “Werdenfelser Land”, “Ammergau”, “Staffelseegebiet” and “Murnauer Moos”, district Garmisch-Partenkirchen) from Germany.

The comparative analysis based on thematic and typological framework was carried out by Pärandkoosluste Ühing in 2025. The analysis identified also the gaps in the list concerning biocultural landscapes of the Breal region; sites demonstrating human-encõhanced biodiversity and traditional hay-making cultural landscapes.

Protection, State of Conservation and Management

A principal focus of management of a World Heritage property is the attributes and features which are associated with or convey the potential Outstanding Universal Value of the property. The aim is to ensure that the value, authenticity and integrity of the property are sustained for the future through managing the attributes. Accordingly, the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value is a key reference for management. Management of the potential Outstanding Universal Value of the property also needs to be delivered in a holistic way that is also relevant to the conservation needs of the property as a whole, and has regard to all its values. Nominated properties should demonstrate that they have an adequate management plan or documented management system to define their management arrangements. If neither of these is in place, it is important to set realistic timeframes for their development, and this may impact on the nomination timetable. Suitable management arrangements should also exist for the buffer zone and the setting for the property. A nomination for a property which does not have satisfactory management at the time of nomination may struggle to achieve World Heritage inscription.

The activities during the last decade in Estonia to protect and sustainably manage wooded meadows, including the implementation of the Woodmeadowlife project, the drafting of management plans and legal protection has been result oriented. The management systems implemented, including the cooperation with the local communities and awareness raising showcase the responsibility for safekeeping the values on national level.

Community involvement and rights based approaches

The current activities in the wooded meadows are very much based on the cooperation with landowners, local communities and volunteers. EKA gave a special emphasis to study the community involvement and rights based approaches during the summer school in 2023.

Appendix

1. Timeline of nomination process (In Estonian). Drafted by UNESCO Estonia NC

EELTAOTLUSE ETAPP (preliminary assessment phase)	
15. sept (1.aasta)	Ministri allkirjastatud eeltaotluse esitamise tähtaeg
15. okt (1. aasta)	Maailmapärandi keskus teavitab riiki, kas eeltaotlus vastab tehnilistele nõuetele ja edastatakse IUCNile/ICOMOSile hindamiseks. Kui eeltaotlus on puudulik, tuleb seda täiendada järgmise aasta 15. septembriks.
Okt (1. aasta)- sept (2.aasta)	Eeltaotluse hindamine. Vajadusel küsib IUCN/ICOMOS riigilt lisainfot.
1.okt (2.aasta)	IUCN/ICOMOS edastavad oma hinnangu ja soovitused riigile. Hinnang kehtib 5 aastat.
Eeltaotluse hinnangu edastamise ja põhitaotluse esitamise vahele peab jääma vähemalt 12 kuud	
PÕHITAOTLUSE ETAPP (nomination dossier phase)	
30. sept (enne 1.aastat)	Vabatahtlik võimalus esitada põhitaotluse mustand maailmapärandi keskusele tagasiside saamiseks
15.nov (enne 1. aastat)	Maailmapärandi keskuse tagasiside riigile (kas midagi on puudu, kas oleks vaja midagi täiendada)
1.veebr (1. aasta)	Ministri allkirjastatud põhitaotluse esitamise tähtaeg. Põhitaotlusele tuleb lisada ka hinnang eeltaotlusele.
1.veebr – 1.märts (1.aasta)	Maailmapärandi keskus teavitab riiki, kas põhitaotlus vastab tehnilistele nõuetele ja edastatakse IUCNile/ICOMOSile hindamiseks. Kui põhitaotlus on puudulik, tuleb seda täiendada ja esitada uuesti mõnel järgmisel aastal.
märts (1.aasta)-mai (2.aasta)	ICOMOS/IUCN hindavad põhitaotlust
31.jaanuar (2.aasta)	ICOMOS/IUCN saavad esitada riigile vajadusel lisaküsimusi
28.veebr (2. aasta)	Lisaküsimustele vastamise tähtaeg
6 nädalat enne komitee istungit (2.aasta)	IUCN/ICOMOS edastavad oma hinnangu maailmapärandi komiteele ja taotluse esitanud riigile/riikidele

Maailmapärandi komitee istung (juuni/juuli 2. aasta)	Komitee langetab otsused maailmapärandi nimekirja kandmise kohta või palub taotlust täiendada (väiksemate täienduste puhul on otsus ’refer’/ suuremate puhul ’defer’)

Maailmapärandi nimekirja **kandetaotlusi hinnatakse kahes etapis**. Eeltaotluse vorm on lihtsam, keskendub võrdlevale analüüsile, kriteeriumitele ja erakordse ülemaailmse väärtuse tuvastamisele. Selles etapis hinnatakse taotluse potentsiaali nimekirja jõuda ja antakse soovitusi põhitaotluse koostamiseks. Põhitaotluse vorm on hästi põhjalik, lisaks eelnevale tuleb detailselt kirjeldada ka kaitsekorraldust, seiret, olemasolevat õigusruumi, rahastust, pärandi tutvustamist, kogukondade kaasamist, ohte pärandile, lisada kaardi- ja fotomaterjali jne.

Riigilt oodatakse hindamiskulude katmist: pärast eeltaotluse esitamist 17 000 USD, pärast tehnilistele nõuetele vastava põhitaotluse esitamist 25 000 USD.