

Development Plan “Sacred Natural Sites in Estonia: Study and Maintenance 2008–2012”

Approved by Republic of Estonia Minister of Culture Directive No. 146 2008

Contents

INTRODUCTION

1. BACKGROUND TO THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

1.1. OBJECT AND DEFINITIONS

1.1.1. Sacred natural sites

1.1.2. Points of departure for identifying sacred natural sites

1.1.3. Main categories of sacred natural sites

1.2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1.2.1. Specific features of Estonian sacred natural sites

1.2.2. Study of sacred natural sites

1.2.3. Maintenance of sacred natural sites

1.3. ANALYSIS OF STATUS QUO

1.3.1. Need for protection of sacred natural sites and related cultural traditions

1.3.2. Laws and international treaties

1.3.3. General assessment of the situation

2. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

2.1. Objectives, measures, performance and output indicators

OBJECTIVE 1 Inventory of sacred natural sites completed in one-third of Estonian parishes

MEASURE 1.1 Creating prerequisites and infrastructure for mapping and inventory

MEASURE 1.2 Mapping and inventory of sacred natural sites

OBJECTIVE 2 Inventoried and preserved sacred natural sites have been placed under protection

MEASURE 2.1 Specification of the legal status of sacred natural sites

MEASURE 2.2 Planning for conservation of sacred natural sites

OBJECTIVE 3 The database of sacred natural sites is available to institutions involved in planning, protection of cultural monuments, and nature conservation

MEASURE 3.1 Creation and development of a database of sacred natural sites

OBJECTIVE 4 Activities to raise awareness and enhance appreciation of sacred natural sites are carried out

MEASURE 4.1 Raising awareness and developing nature friendly values

MEASURE 4.2 Disseminating study results obtained under the development plan

OBJECTIVE 5 Sacred natural sites are continuously managed and demarcated
MEASURE 5.1 Arrangements for management and demarcation of sacred natural sites
MEASURE 5.2 Development and implementation of an advisory system for land owners

3. ESTIMATED COST OF THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN BROKEN DOWN BY MEASURES

4. IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

INTRODUCTION

Historical sacred natural sites are natural sites associated with sacrifice, worship, healing, prayer or other religious or ritual activities according to folkloric, archaeological, historical, ethnological or other data. The development plan “Sacred Natural Sites in Estonia: Study and Maintenance” covers areas of land and individual monuments taken into active use before the 20th century.

In order to ensure the preservation, restoration, revival and use of sacred natural sites and related cultural, natural and social values, it is crucial that relevant issues be systematically addressed on the national level. To achieve the objective, it is necessary to support revision of the legal regulation of sacred natural sites, development of a study methodology, making an inventory and creating a database of sacred natural sites, promotional activities, establishment of an advisory system for the owners and holders of land under the sacred sites, and development and implementation of support measures necessary for the preservation of the sites.

The main target groups (beneficiaries) of the development plan are the owners of sacred natural sites, local governments, followers and researchers of Estonian native religious traditions, enthusiasts of native culture, wildlife and history, and society as a whole. The development plan should result in improved awareness of the value of sacred natural sites and extended possibilities of resuming the related religious and cultural traditions and of sustainable visitation of the sites. Recognition of the significance of sacred natural sites and related traditions is a prerequisite for specific steps to preserve these sites.

The development plan covers the years 2008–2012. Considering the acuteness of the issues and the scope of activities and funds required to address them, a similar plan of measures will be drafted for the subsequent period.

The sacred sites development plan was prepared in 2005–2007 by the Ministry of Culture working groups, composed of representatives of the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of the Interior, National Heritage Board, Estonian House of Taara and Native Religions, Estonian Literary Museum, University of Tartu, and State Forest Management Centre. The development plan was approved by Minister of Culture Directive No. 146 in April 2008.

1. BACKGROUND TO THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

1.1. OBJECT AND DEFINITIONS

1.1.1. Sacred natural sites

Historical sacred natural sites are natural sites associated with sacrifice, worship, healing, prayer or other religious or ritual activities according to folkloric, archaeological, historical, ethnological or other data. The development plan covers areas of land and single monuments which were taken into active use before the 20th century.

Sacred natural sites can be complexes of monuments or individual monuments. Monument complexes cover an area of land within which individual monuments of religious or ritual meaning (such as trees, springs, heaps or depressions in a grove area, to which lore or place names attribute special meaning) can be distinguished.

For monuments defined as an area of land, the concept of sacred natural site also includes the landforms and the individual objects and plants within the area.

1.1.2. Points of departure for identifying sacred natural sites

- Folkloric and ethnographic information: recorded and living local lore, including information from source publications and study materials of the 18th–20th centuries.
- Toponyms: place names referring to the sacred nature of the place (i.e. containing words like ‘holy’, ‘grove’, ‘sacrificial’, ‘healing’; names of deities like ‘Taara’, ‘Uku’, etc.) or to rituals or healing procedures or illnesses being healed (e.g. ‘eye spring’, ‘Subterranean stone’).
- Archaeological information: findings and finding reports, excavation results referring to sacred sites.
- Historical information: chronicles, historical maps and other written sources.
- Living tradition (e.g. drawing of healing water, healing, offering, etc.) or signs of it (e.g. forged nails in a tree trunk, offerings placed on a stone).

1.1.3. Main categories of sacred natural sites

For the purposes of the development plan, sacred natural sites are divided into two categories according to whether full or limited inventory is to be taken of them. Full inventory involves detailed description of each site based on guidelines to be developed in the framework of the development plan. Limited inventory involves mapping and recording of oral traditions.

I Sacred natural sites subject to full inventory:

1. Places/areas that may cover various individual monuments (including places, groves and woods related to the traditions and toponymy of sacred groves).

2. Individual monuments:

- a. stones;
- b. individual trees, groups of trees and woods;
- c. bodies of water:

- i. springs;
 - ii. rivers and streams;
 - iii. lakes and other stagnant water bodies;
 - iv. sea areas (reefs, shallows).
- d. landscape features:
- i. convex landforms: hills, knolls, islands, bog islands;
 - ii. concave landforms: valleys, depressions, holes, karst sinkholes;
 - iii. other landforms: cliffs, caves, etc.
- e. stone heaps;
- f. sacrificial gardens;
- g. roadside places related to sacrificial duties and other rituals;
- h. burial mounds which by themselves or by virtue of their individual parts (stones, trees) associate with traditions of sacredness and sacrifice;
- i. chapel sites from the Catholic period.
3. Other ritual sites:
- a. individual or groups of trees associated with funeral traditions, such as cross-trees;
 - b. objects associated with various magic activities (such as weather spells, marriage and fertility magic, dispelling of revenants).

II Sites subject to mapping and recording of oral traditions:

1. Burial mounds, church and chapel sites and cross hills not associated with traditions of sacredness or sacrifice.
2. Major Midsummer Night bonfire places, the active use of which started before the 19th century.
3. Single stone crosses in the landscape.
4. Places associated in native traditions with losing one's way and with visions.
5. Indented stones and other ancient archaeological monuments.

III Sites not covered by the development plan:

1. Structures covered by the national programme "Preservation and development of churches" (church buildings, houses of prayer).
2. Churchyards, chapels, parish cemeteries and other present-day cemeteries and burial places.

1.2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1.2.1. Specific features of Estonian sacred natural sites

Sacred natural sites – sacred groves, sacred trees, springs, sacrificial stones, sacrificial gardens, trees of crosses, etc. – are an integral part of Estonian history and culture. Having enriched our physical and mental landscape through the centuries, they constitute a unique set of monuments with multi-layered and complex cultural heritage including aspects of natural, tangible and intangible culture, historical, archaeological, religious, folkloric, ethnological and environmental values. It is a most important and essential phenomenon of our ancient native culture, which has had a diverse impact on people over hundreds of years.

In the wider context, Estonian sacred natural sites are a particularly exceptional and rare phenomenon today, as most of the similar ancient monuments and related cultural traditions have vanished in the Occidental Christian Europe. The unusual survival of old traditions owes to Estonia's location and the earlier polarisation of society into countryfolk and higher society with its foreign language and cultural background.

1.2.2. Study of sacred natural sites

As a result of extensive folklore collection activities since the 19th century, Estonian research institutions, archives and museums host information about an estimated 2500 sacred natural sites or more. The numerous records about sacred sites are dispersed between the databases of various institutions and most of them have not been systematically studied. Within the past decade, study and digitisation of local lore and archaeological information about sites has started under various projects but there is a clear need for a single comprehensive database for historical sacred natural sites.

Digitisation of recorded folklore and other relevant information is essential to the compilation of the database and preparation for fieldwork concerning sacred natural sites. In order to code and map the lore about sacred natural sites and to prepare for fieldwork, the entire body of folklore records needs to be digitised as complete texts.

Folkloric, historical, archaeological, natural historical, cartographic and other information, as well as photographs, films, video and audio recordings have been stored in the Estonian Folklore Archive (hereinafter EFA), Estonian National Museum, Institute of History of the University of Tallinn, Institute of the Estonian Language, National Heritage Board, Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore and the Archaeology Unit (Institute of History and Archaeology) of the University of Tartu, as well as local museums and other collections. The volume of records amounts to millions of pages. Plenty of relevant information can also be found in natural scientific and historical collections and publications. An exact overview of the scope of existing material is currently not available.

Sacred natural sites have so far not been a separate subject of study and collection. Folkloristic fieldwork has mostly been all-inclusive, i.e. everything has been collected that is covered by the definition of folklore. Neither have sacred natural sites been in the focus of more extensive archaeological inspections.

Mapping and inventory of sacred natural sites have been prevented by lack of a suitable methodology to include the entire available information in the preparations for and carrying out fieldwork. The lack of a single database, including location data, has hampered coordinated studies and collection work by researchers in various fields. Location data defining the areas of land has been missing until recent times even concerning those sacred sites which have been given the status of cultural monuments. Because of the lacking location data and the dispersion of available information, sacred natural sites have not been paid adequate attention in the planning and carrying out of various nature inventories (such as inventories of key habitats and seminatural plant communities).

The current state of research allows for noting great regional differences within Estonia as regards the composition and distribution of sacred sites. It is also possible to highlight great

importance of sacred groves and other sacred natural sites in our culture and in maintenance of landscape and biological diversity, but the present-day values and protection of sacred sites have received relatively little attention.

1.2.3. Maintenance of sacred natural sites

Due to cultural traditions, sacred natural sites have been protected in Estonia on the grass-roots level throughout centuries. The behavioural patterns and value beliefs rooted in the community meant that locations of many sacred sites were kept secret or actively protected in some places as late as in the 20th century. Civil awareness and decisiveness have halted many developments in recent years which would have changed the appearance of natural sites for good.

While conservation of sacred natural sites on the national level started already before World War II, a new conservation standard was introduced by the Estonian Nature Conservation Society founded in 1966, on whose initiative dozens of sacred sites were placed under protection. Unfortunately, because of the governing ideological pressure, activities were limited to the protection of landscape and individual sites without exploring the essence of the phenomenon. During the past decade, a number of civil society organisations have stood for the protection of sacred natural sites: the Estonian House of Taara and Native Religions, Estonian Fund for Nature, Estonian Green Movement, Paluküla Sacred Grove Hill Custodian Society, etc.

On national level, the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of the Environment are involved in the protection of sacred natural sites within the limits of their respective competences. Still, sacred natural sites have not been adequately addressed, which is why there is no sufficient overview of their number, location, and condition, or of the surviving natural, historical, archaeological, religious and other values. Due to limited financial resources and staffing, some of the mapped sites which have been placed under national protection have not been inventoried. Neither is there any legal regulation that would define sacred sites as wholesome cultural and natural monuments and bearers of intangible cultural heritage and national memory.

The National Heritage Board under the Ministry of Culture organises the protection of immovable monuments which have been defined as cultural monuments under the Heritage Conservation Act, including 452 sacred natural sites (www.muinas.ee). Most of them have been classified as archaeological monuments and a small part of them as historical monuments. The protection of sacred natural sites has thus focused on the possible archaeological value of the sites. Moreover, for many sacred sites, protection covers only a part of the site area or only some of the individual objects in the area.

The permanent expert committees for archaeology and landscape architecture, which advise the National Heritage Board, only partly touch on sacred natural sites in their discussions. As sacred natural sites cover a large variety of cultural and natural values as well as social aspects, the subject goes far beyond the realms of archaeological and historical monuments.

The Ministry of the Environment protects nearly a thousand individual natural sites (www.eelis.ee) under the Nature Conservation Act; the number of included sacred sites is unknown because relevant analysis has not been made. Neither is it known how many sacred sites are located in nature conservation areas. There are about fifty protected individual objects whose

name refers to 'sacred grove' or 'holy'. A number of protected individual objects are known whose names do not refer to these words, but which are also under heritage protection and have cultural historical value. The number, location and area of those sacred sites which have been designated as natural monuments cannot be exactly determined at the moment because of the unavailability of a comprehensive database and location information on sacred sites.

1.3. ANALYSIS OF STATUS QUO

1.3.1. Need for protection of sacred natural sites and related cultural traditions

Sacred natural sites are an integral part of Estonian cultural traditions dating back thousands of years. At the same time, the preservation and restoration of traditions are important for ensuring balanced and sustainable development on the national, regional and local levels.

Over the past centuries, foreign powers have consistently damaged and destroyed the sacred natural sites of Estonia and forcibly suppressed the observance of related traditions. The large-scale agriculture of the Soviet period destroyed or damaged a great many ancient sacred groves and sacrificial sites. The ruins of former agricultural and military structures can be found at sacred sites or their immediate vicinity. Many sacrificial springs dried up as a result of the alteration of the groundwater regime by land improvement and mining. Owing to interruption of the population continuity and to urbanisation, living lore and traditional values relating to sacred sites are disappearing.

Sacred natural sites as historical objects are endangered by the death of living lore on one hand and ignorance of their existence on the other. Often only a few old people remember the locations or existence of sacred sites. Unless researchers interview these people in the forthcoming years, many significant and valuable sites will disappear from the heritage landscape and be forever lost for society. This has a shrinking effect on the Estonian cultural landscape.

The situation is critical because sacred natural sites have not been methodically sought till now, while the location data collected in earlier studies are insufficient or outdated. Moreover, our landscape changed considerably in the 20th century owing to urbanisation and extensive agriculture.

The lack or poor availability of relevant information means that local, county-level and national development plans cannot take adequate account of sacred natural sites. The attitude to sacred sites is often ignorant and careless. A large number of known sacred natural sites are in a poor state, as land use and management plans have not specifically regulated their maintenance. For sustainable management of environmental resources, including preservation of local cultural heritage, local governments and other agencies involved in spatial planning need much more information about sacred natural sites.

Little appreciation of sacred natural sites, lack of knowledge and interest, but also the diversity of the sites and their features, such as aspects of natural and social, intangible and tangible culture – have resulted in legal uncertainty for these sites. Estonian legislation not only lacks direct regulation of sacred natural sites, but does not even mention their existence.

1.3.2. Laws and international treaties

In connection with the state's constitutional obligation to guarantee the preservation of the Estonian nation and culture through the ages, the lasting of Estonian cultural traditions is one of the main objectives of the Fundamentals of the Estonian Cultural Policy approved by the Riigikogu (RT I 1998, 81, 1353). According to the Fundamentals of the Estonian Cultural Policy, the significance of an activity for national culture is a priority aspect in the national funding of culture. The state also pays special attention to the preservation of unique, and especially of endangered cultural phenomena of certain regions; this undoubtedly includes Estonian sacred natural sites and related cultural traditions.

The Riigikogu has ratified the UNESCO World Heritage Convention (RT II 1995, 10, 53), according to which deterioration or disappearance of any item of the cultural or natural heritage constitutes a harmful impoverishment of the heritage of all the nations of the world. The Convention stresses the need for the state's financial support for the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations of the cultural and natural heritage. The Convention covers also Estonian sacred natural sites.

At the beginning of 2006, the Government of the Republic approved the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (RT II 2006 19, 51), the preamble of which refers to human rights instruments, in particular the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966. The Convention stresses the importance of the intangible cultural heritage as a mainspring of cultural diversity and a guarantee of sustainable development, as well as deep-seated interdependence between the intangible cultural heritage and the tangible cultural and natural heritage, which is especially well demonstrated in sacred natural sites.

The purposes of the Convention are: to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage; to ensure respect for the intangible cultural heritage of the communities, groups and individuals concerned; to raise awareness at the local, national and international levels of the importance of the intangible cultural heritage, and of ensuring mutual appreciation thereof; to provide for international cooperation and assistance.

Of national laws, sacred natural sites are regulated particularly by the Heritage Conservation Act (RT I 2002, 27, 153) and Nature Conservation Act (RT I 2004, 38, 258).

The Heritage Conservation Act classifies sacred natural sites as immovable monuments; for these, protection effectively covers only the archaeological cultural layer. Unfortunately, no implementation legislation or methodological guidelines currently exist for placing sacred natural sites under protection, for delineating their boundaries and organising their protection. The fact that the Heritage Conservation Act does not contain a definition of sacred natural sites has apparently also hindered maintenance of these sites.

The Nature Conservation Act governs among other things the protection of species and their permanent habitats, individual natural objects and landscapes; the objective of the Act is to ensure the preservation of natural values. While individual natural objects with a cultural value may be protected under the Nature Conservation Act, the protection does not directly cover

intangible and tangible cultural heritage. For example, dried (sacrificial) trees or broken stones are deleted from the list of protected objects, although certain cultural values may be preserved in those objects. The Nature Conservation Act with its main focus on the protection of natural values does not ensure the preservation and improvement of the condition of sacred natural sites.

Sacred natural sites associate with the freedom of religion as a fundamental right of persons. The Constitution of Estonia enshrines everyone's freedom to exercise his or her religion, both alone and in community with others, in public or in private, unless this is detrimental to public order, health or morals. The religious beliefs and rituals of religious associations and persons recognising the Estonian traditional native religions (*Taarausk* and *Maausk*) are related to sacred natural sites, which carry historical lore and have spiritual meaning for the worshippers. Members of native religious groups view sacred natural sites as wholesome natural and cultural heritage objects that perpetuate site-related memory and cultural traditions. The possibility of new sacred groves is purely theoretical from the viewpoint of traditional native religion, as it would take centuries and require a native religious cultural environment.

Since legal regulation does not ensure the maintenance of sacred natural site as wholesome heritage objects, possibilities for following native religious traditions (such as meditation and peace of mind, prayer, offering, healing, following certain traditions of the native calendar) are also not ensured. Another important aspect is that free access is guaranteed only to those sacred natural sites which are placed under national protection or are located on state land. The circle of persons who may wish to practice native spiritual rituals at the sacred natural sites is wide, because the traditions related to sacred natural sites are an integral part of the intangible cultural heritage of native Estonians. More narrowly, 11% of the Estonian population have declared native religious traditions ('taarausk' and 'maausk') as their closest religious affiliation (public opinion poll commissioned by the Riigikogu, July 2002, http://www.riigikogu.ee/?rep_id=577301 pp. 18, 58 and 59).

According to the principle of equal treatment enshrined in the Constitution, the sacred natural sites of native Estonians should be given the same status of sacred sites as enjoyed by the shrines of other, 'imported' religions. This could be done by amending e.g. the Land Tax Act and defining sacred natural sites as tax-exempt objects.

The existing national laws regulate the issues of sacred natural sites in general terms, but do not recognise these sites as wholesome natural and cultural monuments associated with the preservation of national memory and culture. Another factor that significantly hinders preservation of sacred natural sites is that conservation of intangible cultural heritage is not regulated. The uncertain legal status of sacred sites causes unnecessary confrontations in society, hinders regional development, prevents the protection and restoration of sacred sites and related intangible cultural heritage, and causes problems for followers of native religious traditions.

1.3.3. General assessment of the situation

In order to ensure the preservation, restoration, revival and use of sacred natural sites and related cultural, natural and social values, it is crucial that relevant issues be systematically addressed on the national level.

The development plan for the study and maintenance of sacred natural sites has to be launched in cooperation between the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Education and Research, local governments, research institutions, religious and other civil society organisations.

2. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

2.1. Objectives, measures, performance and output indicators

The overall objective of the development plan is to preserve the unique features of Estonian sacred natural sites and related intangible cultural heritage via their research, appreciation and maintenance.

Performance indicator of the general objective: In the previously selected monitoring area, a natural restoration process has begun for the inventoried sacred natural sites by the year 2012 and the condition of these sites has not deteriorated compared to the year 2008.

Objectives

OBJECTIVE 1 Inventory of sacred natural sites completed in one-third of Estonian parishes

Until now, sacred natural sites have been studied mainly from the aspect of intangible cultural heritage. Study results have been published in some books and compilations of articles. Less attention has been paid to mapping and natural scientific research of sacred sites. Taking into account the available experience of folklorists, archaeologists and natural scientists in the study of monuments and specific natural scientific inventories, preparatory work has been done in 2001–2006 on strategy and methodology for the inventory of sacred sites. The work should be completed under this development plan under the guidance of the University of Tartu.

Of the sacred natural sites known from folklore and historical sources, up to one-fifth are currently under national protection; there is no overview of the location and preserved value of the remaining sites. Most of the protected sites have not been properly inventoried. Pilot projects have shown that researchers are still unaware of a considerable number of sacred sites. This is why mapping and inventory of sacred natural sites is one of the most important objectives of this development plan.

The inventory has to reveal the number, location and condition of preserved sacred natural sites in Estonia.

MEASURE 1.1 Creation of prerequisites and infrastructure for mapping and inventory

Activities:

- development of a methodology;
- set-up of a cooperation network;
- initiation of national and international cooperation projects.

The University of Tartu is the implementing agency for preparatory work for research and for field and laboratory work, as well as other tasks outlined in this development plan.

In order to solve interdisciplinary research issues and develop a coordinated division of work, the implementing agency will enter into cooperation agreements with the involved agencies, universities, civil associations and persons. In addition to state funding, domestic and foreign co-financing will be sought. One of the goals of the project-based research is to give society competent assistance in the guided utilisation of natural resources.

The implementing agency will develop the research methodology and complement it on the basis of information obtained in the course of fieldwork.

Agencies, organisations, civil associations and a network of researchers will be created for the purposes of fieldwork and joint projects will be undertaken. Also, international projects will be undertaken with agencies and associations involved in the study, presentation and protection of sacred natural sites.

MEASURE 1.2 Mapping and inventory of sacred natural sites

Activities:

- preparations for field studies;
- conduct of field studies;
- formulation of the results of field studies.

Sacred natural sites will be mapped and inventoried using a common methodology. Extensive collection of folklore is an integral part of the fieldwork. Considering the traditions of territorial systematisation that have developed in national sciences, work will be conducted on a county and parish basis.

Because of the complexity and scope of the work and the seasonal nature of fieldwork, not more than one-third of Estonia's former parishes can be covered by the inventory of sacred natural sites during the period of this development plan. The remaining areas have to be covered during the subsequent period of the development plan.

OBJECTIVE 2 Inventoried and preserved sacred natural sites have been placed under protection

According to laws and international treaties, the Estonian state has the duty to regulate the issues of sacred natural sites in such a way as to ensure the study, presentation, restoration and transmission to future generations of sacred sites and related tangible and intangible cultural heritage and natural values, and guarantee the application of the principles of freedom of religion and equal treatment

Based on the aforementioned, one of the main tasks of this development plan is to analyse and elaborate on the legislation and management plans pertaining to sacred natural sites.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of sacred natural sites as sources for studying native religion and as carriers of local culture and identity. Nevertheless, only up to one-fifth of the known sacred sites are currently under official protection. Even for these, protection often covers only a part of their area and values. In order to ensure preservation of local intangible and tangible cultural heritage, improvement of its condition and transmission to future generations, national protection should be extended to all the preserved sacred natural sites.

Sacred natural sites are a group of numerous and complex monuments that have implications for various fields of research, administration, and other areas of activity. It is estimated that the number of sacred natural sites protected as cultural monuments may increase from the known 416 to 1000–2000 as a result of the implementation of this and the subsequent development plans. Since the current staffing of the National Heritage Board does not ensure the adequate protection of sacred natural sites, changes are necessary in the organisation's structure.

MEASURE 2.1 Specification of the legal status of sacred natural sites

Activities:

- set-up of a working group for the legal issues of sacred natural sites;
- analysis of relevant legislation;
- proposals to amend legislation.

The working group for legal issues should include representatives of archaeologists, lawyers, folklorists, ethnologists, Religious Affairs Department of the Ministry of the Interior, religious associations and other interested and competent agencies and associations. After an analysis, the working group will draft proposals to amend existing laws and/or a new law on sacred natural sites, which is to ensure the preservation and restoration of the social, natural, intangible and tangible cultural values inherent in sacred sites. It will be proposed to provide tax-exemption for the land under sacred sites.

MEASURE 2.2 Planning for conservation of sacred natural sites

Activities:

- preparation of methodological bases for management of sacred sites;
- set-up of an expert committee for sacred natural sites at the National Heritage Board;
- structural changes in the National Heritage Board so as to ensure protection of sacred natural sites;
- preparation of management plans for each sacred site proposed for protection;
- designating sacred natural sites as protected;
- set-up of a network of custodians.

As there are no officially approved methodological bases for the mapping and delimitation of sacred natural sites and for their management, a working group has to be set up to solve these issues. The working group will include representatives of archaeologists, lawyers, folklorists, ethnologists, Religious Affairs Department of the Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of the Environment, religious associations and other interested and competent agencies and associations.

An expert committee for sacred natural sites will be set up at the National Heritage Board, composed of the representatives of competent research establishments, institutions and interest groups. Consideration should be given to defining sacred natural sites as a separate category of monuments and creating the position of a chief specialist for supervision of this area in the National Heritage Board.

OBJECTIVE 3 The database of sacred natural sites is available to institutions involved in planning, protection of cultural monuments, and nature conservation

The database focusing on sacred natural sites would consist of folkloric, archaeological, natural historical, ethnological, cartographic, historical and other data on sacred natural sites and provide information on the exact location, condition and form of ownership of each site.

The lack of a database of sacred natural sites poses a direct obstacle to studies and conservation planning, including preparations for an inventory. This is why the primary task of this

development plan is to collect, digitise, code and map the existing information on sacred natural sites and to create a database from this information.

MEASURE 3.1 Creation and development of a database of sacred natural sites

Activities:

- creation and ordering of an online database of sacred natural sites;
- compilation and elaboration of the database and input of fieldwork data;
- administration of the database.

Compilation and updating of the database involves digitisation and/or systematisation of data on sacred natural sites: texts, audio and video recordings and pictures (photos, drawings, schemes, maps); these will be linked to a digital base map of Estonia and made cross-usable between various databases. Upon creation of the database, relevant data have to be selected, digitised, checked, described, and metadata created; arrangements have to be made for storage of the data and their availability to users.

In order to safeguard confidential information on sacred sites and related personal data, the database will allow for various user groups with varying user rights within the groups. The database will be designed so as to accommodate further materials to be collected in the course of fieldwork and studies.

OBJECTIVE 4 Activities to raise awareness and enhance appreciation of sacred natural sites are carried out

The development plan relies upon the education system, museums and the media for promotion of the issues related to sacred natural sites.

This objective will be pursued giving due consideration to the specificity of sacred natural sites as vulnerable natural monuments and carriers of local identity. Any activities that might damage the sites will be avoided (such as mass tourism, building, treasure hunting or other non-traditional activities).

The purpose of wider presentation to the public is to raise awareness of sacred sites and the related values and cultural traditions. A more thorough presentation of the sacred sites of each area will be carried out on the local, especially the county and rural municipality levels.

MEASURE 4.1 Raising awareness and developing nature friendly values

Activities:

- launch media projects, disseminate information on the television and radio via dedicated series of programmes;
- create and regularly update a web portal on sacred natural sites;
- advise ministries and county and local governments to ensure that spatial planning and development programmes provide for conservation of the traditional appearance and regional characteristics of sacred natural sites;
- provide advice for supplementing comprehensive school curricula and developing relevant training aids;
- organise public events and information campaigns;

- organise creative competitions on the theme of sacred natural sites;
- prepare educational programmes for museums.

In raising public awareness and promoting public involvement, attention will be paid to the comprehensive use of media possibilities throughout the development plan. For a more effective result, published articles and interviews will be complemented by longer-term media campaigns, e.g. appropriate series of radio and television programmes. Public opinion polls will be conducted individually and in conjunction with other studies for the specific planning of information activities and for assessing the results.

As thematic and general planning have major influence on shaping the landscape (and serve as a basis for detailed planning), county and local governments need to be advised to incorporate into thematic and general plans the provisions for maintenance and/or restoration of the traditional appearance and regional characteristics of sacred natural sites.

As one of the outputs of implementation of the development plan, the curricula of comprehensive schools will be supplemented with information on sacred natural sites in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Research.

MEASURE 4.2 Disseminating study results obtained under the development plan

Activities:

- exhibitions (including online exhibitions);
- publications and articles;
- seminars, round tables, training days, etc;
- publication of regional reviews on sacred natural sites.

Exhibitions in local and central museums, various publications, including regional reviews, as well as virtual presentations and online information will help with presentation of the sacred sites in specific regions and strengthen the self-awareness of the local people.

Development and/or conservation recommendations prepared on the basis of study results will help raise people's awareness and adherence to the local values. Seminars will provide information on aid programmes offering support for regional development and preservation of the special features of the cultural landscape.

OBJECTIVE 5 Sacred natural sites are continuously managed and demarcated

From the viewpoint of regional development in Estonia, it is important to improve the situation of sacred natural sites, raise awareness of the related intangible heritage and support revival of traditions.

Pilot projects have revealed that the appearance of most sacred natural sites has been more or less impaired by human activities, especially economic activities. Nevertheless, many sacred sites have survived as natural objects and their original appearance can be restored or improved.

Maintenance of sacred sites (such as demolition and removal of unwanted structures, using local and traditional techniques for building fences and gates, supporting recovery of natural plant communities, installation of information boards, etc.) appreciates the local identity and physical environment and adds to their value.

While, as a rule, no major investments are needed for restoration of sacred sites, funds are required to order the necessary expert assessments on the maintenance or restoration of the sites, as well as to carry out maintenance activities, including demolishing and removal of unwanted structures. As in nature conservation areas, funds are needed to compensate land owners for the economic loss resulting from the protective restrictions by way of reduction of or exemption from land tax.

MEASURE 5.1 Arrangements for management and demarcation of sacred natural sites

Activities:

- establishing principles for demarcation of sacred natural sites;
- demarcation of sacred natural sites;
- maintenance of sacred natural sites;
- formulating principles for allocation of support for the maintenance and restoration of sacred sites;
- implementation of support measures for conservation and maintenance of sacred sites (during the subsequent implementation period of the development plan).

MEASURE 5.2 Development and implementation of an advisory system for land owners

Activities:

- creation of an advisory network;
- development, publication and dissemination of guidance materials for the protection and preservation of sacred sites;
- training activities: comprehensive educational lectures on indigenous landscapes and native religion, courses on the establishment of traditional wooden and stone fences and swings;
- development of the web portal.

A continuously working and available advisory service needs to be created for the protection and restoration of sacred sites. A nationwide advisory network needs to be developed for interested persons to receive information and advice, including via the Internet. The training and advisory system should be linked to the advisory network on rural architecture and landscapes.

3. ESTIMATED COST OF THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN BROKEN DOWN BY MEASURES¹

Title of measure	2008	2009		2010		2011		2012	
	MoC budget	MoC budget	Actual need	MoC budget	Actual need	MoC budget	Actual need	MoC budget	Actual need
1.1. Creation of prerequisites and infrastructure for mapping and inventory	EEK 388 280	EEK 318 648		EEK 350 520		EEK 385 572		EEK 424 128	
1.2. Mapping and inventory of sacred natural sites			EEK 2 171 320		EEK 3 143 440		EEK 3 433 160		EEK 3 962 040
2.1. Specification of the legal status of sacred natural sites			EEK 50 000		EEK 0		EEK 0		EEK 0
2.2. Organising conservation of sacred natural sites			EEK 120 000		EEK 170 000		EEK 230 000		EEK 230 000
3.1. Creation and development of a database of sacred natural sites	EEK 111 720	EEK 181 352	EEK 872 008	EEK 149 480	EEK 1 009 240	EEK 114 428	EEK 1 160 152	EEK 75 872	EEK 1 326 148
4.1. Awareness rising and development of nature friendly values			EEK 500 000		EEK 750 000		EEK 1 000 000		EEK 1 200 000
4.2. Dissemination of study results obtained under the development plan			EEK 150 000		EEK 350 000		EEK 500 000		EEK 600 000
5.1. Management and demarcation of sacred natural sites			EEK 120 000		EEK 250 000		EEK 250 000		EEK 300 000
5.2. Development and implementation of an advisory system for land owners			EEK 50 000		EEK 100 000		EEK 100 000		EEK 120 000
TOTAL	EEK 500 000	EEK 500 000	EEK 4 033 328	EEK 500 000	EEK 5 772 680	EEK 500 000	EEK 6 673 312	EEK 500 000	EEK 7 738 188
GRAND TOTAL	EEK 500 000	EEK 4 533 328		EEK 6 272 680		EEK 7 173 312		EEK 8 238 188	

¹ Objectives have been set presuming that funding is guaranteed according to the estimated cost of the development plan as per item 3. Should actual funding be reduced, the entire scope of the objectives cannot be fulfilled.

4. IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

The Ministry of Culture will be responsible for implementation of the development plan and will revise or terminate the plan at the proposal of the steering committee.

The development plan will be carried out on the basis of annual implementation plans detailing the specific character and scope of the measures to be implemented in the forthcoming year and the needed management arrangements.

Steering committee:

Implementation of the development plan will be coordinated by a steering committee to be set up at the National Heritage Board and bringing together representatives of:

1. Ministry of the Environment;
2. Ministry of Culture;
3. Ministry of the Interior (Minister of Regional Affairs);
4. Ministry of Education and Research;
5. Ministry of Agriculture;
6. National Heritage Board;
7. University of Tartu;
8. Estonian House of Taara and Native Religions.