

## DEVELOPING SWEDEN'S NATURE RESTORATION PLAN: A MID-TERM ASSESSMENT

*The Nature Restoration Law (NRL) is a recent, significant piece of nature legislation that covers all terrestrial and marine ecosystems. For its implementation, Member States are required to develop a national Nature Restoration Plan (NRP) by September 2026. The quality of NRPs will determine the law's actual effect to restore ecosystems across Europe. The #RestoreNature coalition has developed a checklist to evaluate the preparation of restoration plans across EU Member States at mid-term, based on four criteria: science-based, inclusiveness, ambition and empowerment. This factsheet provides an assessment of the progress made by Sweden in developing its national NRP.*

### OVERALL PROGRESS

Sweden has been a member of EU since 1995 and has until the last years been relatively ambitious in nature conservation. However, Sweden has clearly shifted in ambition in nature conservation and has been against the NRL and is still trying to weaken the law.

Sweden is initiating the process to put forward a national restoration plan (NRP) in good time. However, lack of ambition can be read in the directives, and low resources have been provided to authorities for this work. The mid-term assessment shows poor progress and suggests that the government still needs to make extensive further efforts regarding the scientific quality, ambition, and empowerment of the NRP development process. However, the inclusiveness of the NRP process is satisfying.



**EARLY STAGE**

## ASSESSMENT HIGHLIGHTS



### Good practices and achievements

- Inclusiveness: Generally, a good inclusion of a wide range of stakeholders, approximately 300 participants from various sectors.
- Authorities have prioritized development of the NRP despite the lack of earmarked resources. Good cooperation between the authorities.
- With current progress, there is a good chance to deliver the plan on time.



### To be improved

- The government has conveyed a clearly negative image of the Nature Restoration Law rather than promoting nature restoration and its benefits. Public information about restoration and the NRP process has been limited. It is important to change the narrative on restoration and to ensure consultation over the full NRP draft.
- The ambition of preparatory work should be improved. Knowledge gaps have been identified by the authorities and communicated with the government. There were general drawdowns in nature restoration for the last 3 years, and limited additional funding was made available this year.



### Delays and inadequacies

- Currently the restoration plan lacks a sound scientific basis. Favorable reference areas for grasslands, forest habitats, and wetlands are politically motivated rather than based on ecological needs and best available scientific information.
- The NRP needs to be empowered with sufficient resources for authorities' work and for restoration measures.
- General lack of ambition due to directives from the government. The Swedish government has instructed authorities to maximize the use of exceptions and to use favourable reference areas for grasslands and forests that are not based on science to minimize the need for protection and restoration. Government directive towards the responsible authorities for developing a national restoration plan needs to be significantly more ambitious and positive towards nature restoration and its advantages.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure a science-based approach in the NRP by using ecologically based favourable reference areas and abstain from applying derogations that undermine the purpose of the NRL.
- Allocate sufficient resources for protection and management of protected areas, including earmarked resources for implementation of the Restoration law to authorities.
- The Government needs to give restoration a chance, not see the regulation merely as a burden. Stop ongoing attempts to weaken the law.
- Ensure policy coherence. Change the current national weakening of nature conservation policy since it is going against the aim of the NRL.

# DETAILED ASSESSMENT

## Is the NRP development process...

### Key facts

### Recommendations

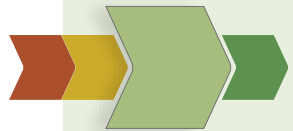
#### Science-based?



- Selected scientists have been involved in consultation.
- There is a good analysis of ecologically favorable reference areas.
- Insufficient funding for filling knowledge gaps
- Politically-set favourable reference areas weaken restoration ambition for grasslands, forest habitats and wetlands.

- Follow the legal requirement to base the NRP on to best available knowledge
- Use ecologically based favourable reference values.

#### Inclusive?



- Ambitious consultation process for stakeholders.
- Several key decisions were made before the NRP work began and have not been subject to consultation.
- Consultation on an early draft of the NRP has been conducted.
- A strategic impact assessment is being developed.
- Unknown if a full draft of the NRP will be out for consultation.
- Regional and local perspective poorly covered.
- Not a wide outreach to the science community

- Ensure a public consultation of a full draft of the NRP.
- Include the science community to a larger extent.
- Improve the involvement of counties, municipalities and NGOs on local and regional level in the NRP development.

#### Ambitious?



- The NRP will likely be submitted in time.
- The government has significantly reduced the budget allocated for the implementation of the measures.
- The government directive is to use all exceptions possible to minimize restoration.

- Increase the budget for monitoring, mapping and restoration measures.
- Aim for the purpose of the law – restoring biodiversity; not to maximize exceptions and minimize ambition.
- Grant agencies the necessary mandate to develop a science-based plan aligned with the EU legal obligations.
- Integrate restoration goals into sectoral policies (forestry, agriculture, energy) to avoid goal conflicts and ensure policies are mutually reinforcing.

#### Empowered?



- Good collaboration between the relevant authorities.
- The government is not promoting restoration or implementation of the NRL publicly.
- The Swedish Environmental Agency lacks resources to reach out widely about restoration and the measures needed.

- The government should promote the benefits of nature restoration.
- Ensure sufficient resources for authorities to implement the NRL.