



EU LIFE Programme project
"Optimising the Governance and Management of the
Natura 2000 Protected Areas Network in Latvia"
(LIFE19 IPE/LV/000010 LIFE-IP LatViaNature)



Engaging Private Landowners in Forest Biodiversity Conservation through Voluntary Approaches in Latvia

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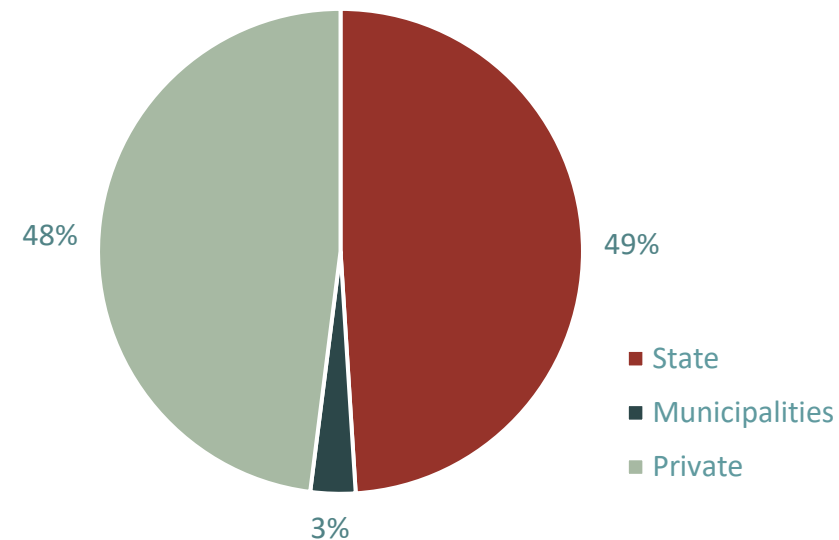
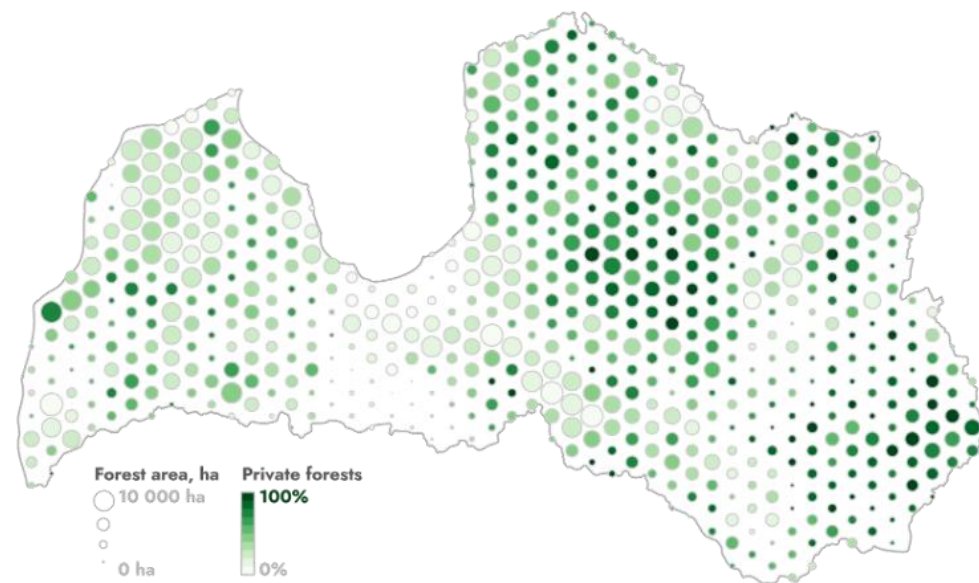
LIFE-IP LatViaNature, Nature Conservation Agency of Latvia

08.09.2026 Estonia

Nordic-Baltic LIFE Platform Meeting 2026

Forest in Latvia

- ✓ Forest land - 52% (3,4 million ha)
- ✓ A half of forests are privately owned
- ✓ ~116 000 private forest owners
- ✓ > 80% of them own forests that are smaller than 20 ha (50% under 5 ha)
- ✓ Total cutting volume ~16 million m³ per year
- ✓ Wood ~15% of total export value



Private land conservation context

- Regulatory conservation background (limited voluntary mechanisms)
- Trust issues
- Dissatisfaction with the compensation system
- Public protests
- Legal cases
- Limited progress in private land conservation



<https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/society/05.03.2024-photos-farmers-and-forestry-representatives-protest-in-riga.a545466/>

Survey of private forest owners (2022, n = 599)

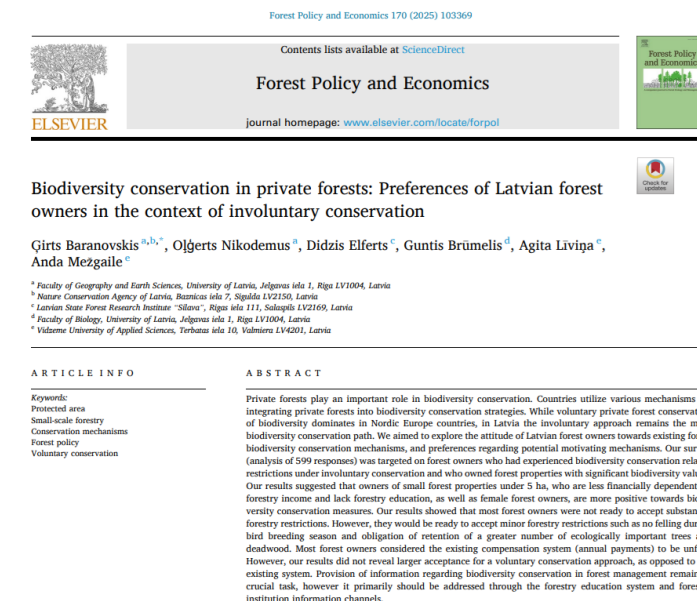
- 80% of forest owners unsatisfied with financial support
- ~ **20-25% of landowners have very positive attitude towards nature conservation**
- Missing voluntary mechanisms
- Important factors:
 - size of forest property
 - female forest owners
 - income from forestry
 - forestry education



 **20–25% of private landowners have a very positive attitude towards biodiversity conservation measures**

Survey results:

Baranovskis, Ģ., Nikodemus, O., Elferts, D., Brūmelis, G., Līviņa, A., Mežgaile, A. 2025. Biodiversity conservation in private forests: Preferences of Latvian forest owners in the context of involuntary conservation. Forest Policy and Economics 170, 103369. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.forpol.2024.103369>



Designing pilot-programmes

Opinion of landowners

- ✓ Forest owners' survey (2022; n=599)
- ✓ Grassland owners' survey (2022; n=442)
- ✓ Public opinion on nature conservation in Latvia (2021; n=1064)

+

Best practices of other countries

+

Cooperation with diverse stakeholders



LIVING FOREST



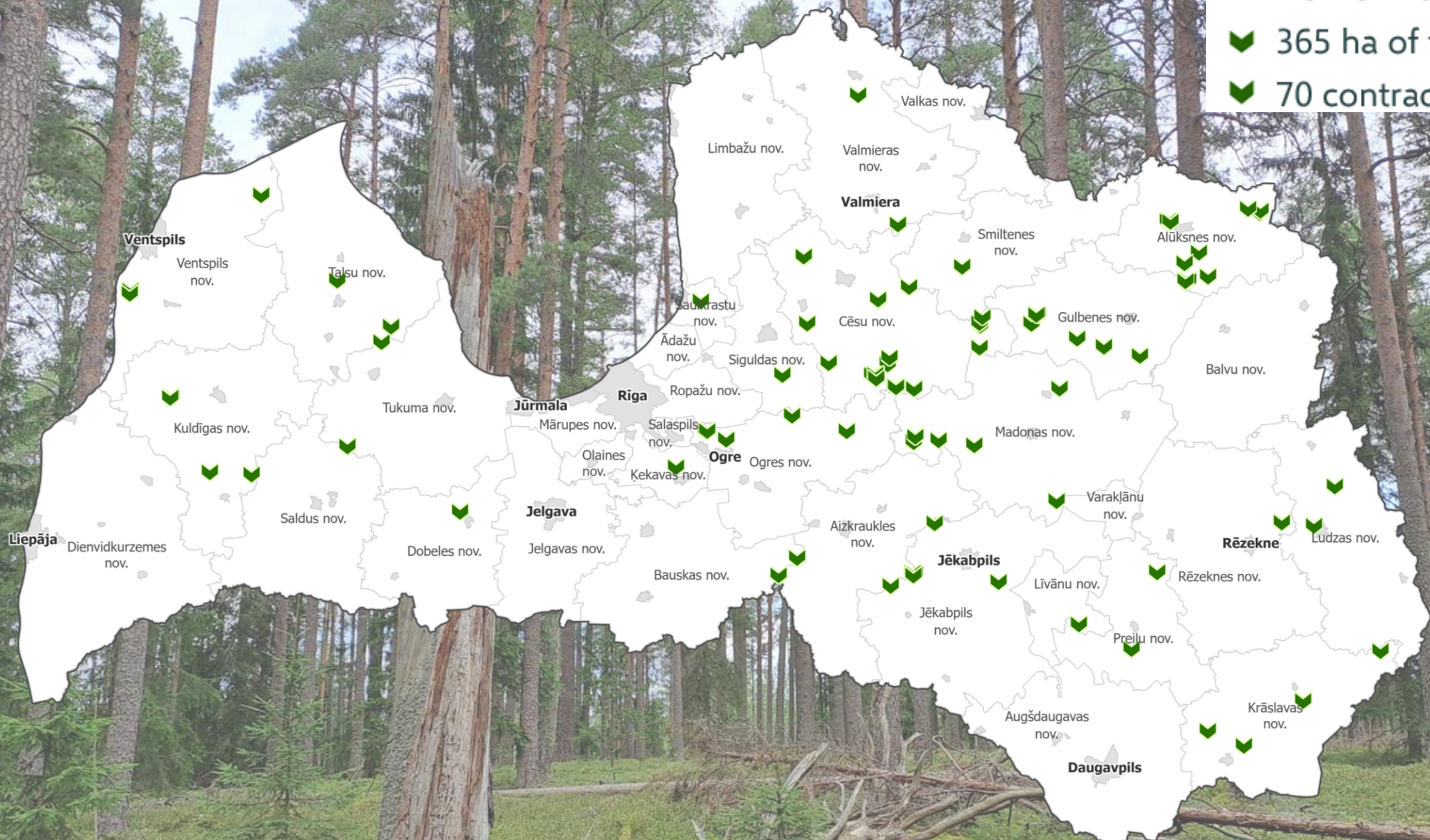
BLOOMING MEADOWS



LIVING FOREST:

▼ 365 ha of forests

▼ 70 contracts



LIVING FOREST

- ❖ **Voluntary (contract-based) approach**
- ❖ 4 years (2023-2026)
- ❖ Private forests outside N2000
- ❖ Trees >25 cm diameter
- ❖ Diverse forests (0,6-15 ha)
- ❖ Significantly over final felling age
- ❖ Consultative and financial support
- ❖ Forest habitats of EU importance:
 - ❖ 9050 Fennoscandian herb-rich forests with *Picea abies*
 - ❖ 9010* Western Taiga
 - ❖ 91D0* Bog Woodland
 - ❖ 9080* Fennoscandian deciduous swamp woods



Habitat Conservation

Habitat Creation

Nature-friendly Forestry

Living Forest: sub-programmes

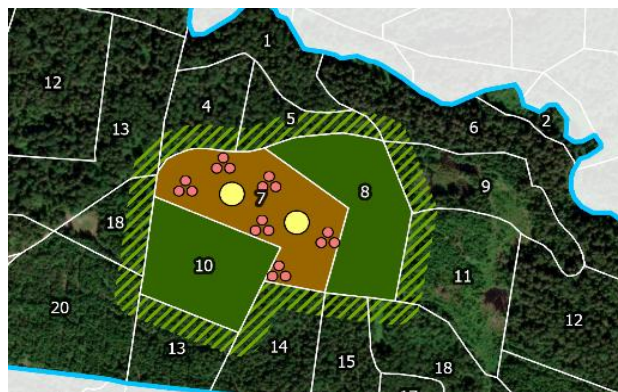
Habitat conservation (A1)

- Do not interfere (no logging in the protected habitat)
- Preserve the buffer zone around the protected habitat polygons (selective logging is allowed)
- No harvesting for economic purposes



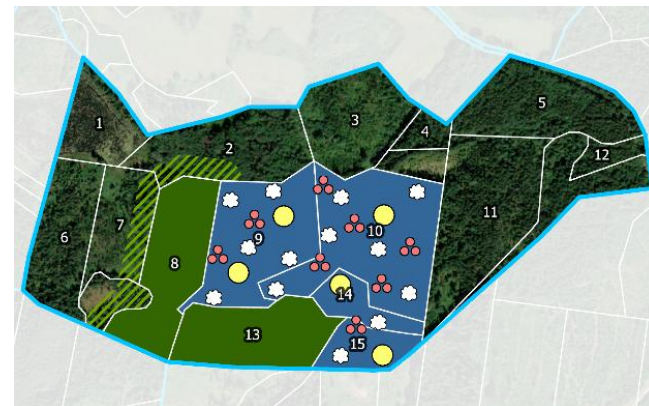
Habitat creation (A2)

- Create multi-aged forest stand structure
- Preserve and create dead wood
- Preserve the buffer zone
- No harvesting for economic purposes



Nature-friendly forestry (B)

- Preserve the oldest and largest trees (20 trees/ha)
- Preserve and create dead wood
- Selective logging to mimic natural disturbances
- Create multi-aged forest stand structure
- Seasonal forestry restrictions
- Harvesting of timber for economic purposes is allowed



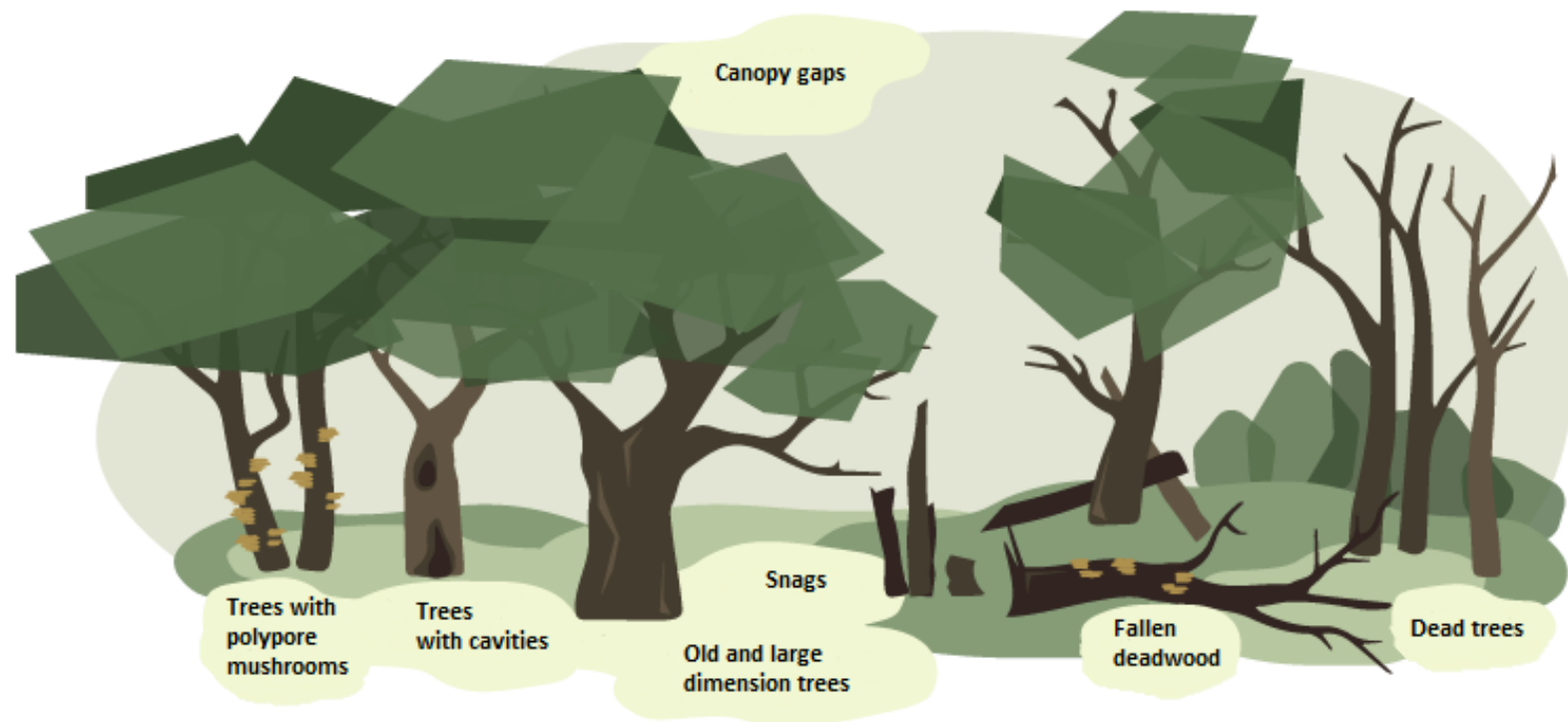
Financial support calculation

- ❖ Individual calculation of financial support:
 - composition of tree species
 - productivity of forest stand
- ❖ Financial support methodology developed by researchers at Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies (LBTU)
- ❖ State Forest Service database
- ❖ Average support: 198 euro/ha
- ❖ Annual or final payment approach

A1/A2	Support rates euro/ha year						
Site index (productivity)	Ia	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Aspen	138	116	93	43	1	0	0
Grey alder	104	89	65	33	11	0	0
Birch	221	164	130	92	33	12	0
Spruce	359	326	279	203	136	31	21
Common alder	145	96	76	54	37	16	0
Oak	631	536	516	480	0	0	0
Pine	398	363	308	224	175	114	102

B	Support rates euro/ha year						
Site index (productivity)	Ia	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Aspen	69	52	43	21	1	0	0
Grey alder	56	39	31	18	7	0	0
Birch	119	78	64	48	18	8	0
Spruce	194	159	134	97	66	23	17
Common alder	85	58	44	31	23	12	0
Oak	335	279	286	253	0	0	0
Pine	211	191	152	108	85	54	51

Elements of forest structure



- Monitored **by forest owner** and forest biodiversity expert
- Monitoring methodology developed by researchers at University of Latvia
- Methodology: Brūmelis, G., Dauškane, I., Ikauniece S., Laime, B., Leimanis, L., Tjarve, D. 2023. Meža biotopu apsaimniekošanas vienkāršotā monitoringa metodika. https://latvianature.daba.gov.lv/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Meza_vienkarsots_monitorigs_all.pdf



Example of forest structure assessment

Forest stand area: 1.42 ha						
Elements of the forest structure	Amount		Quality assessment			
	In polygon	Per ha	Low	Average	Good	Excellent
			1 point	2 points	3 points	4 points
Large-dimension trees ($d \geq 70$ cm; $d \geq 35$)	1	1	< 5	6 - 10	11 - 15	15 <
Snags ($d \geq 25$ cm; $d \geq 20$)	20	14	1 - 2	3 - 5	6 - 10	10 <
Dead (standing) trees ($d \geq 25$ cm; $d \geq 20$)	1	1	1 - 5	6 - 10	11 - 15	15 <
Fallen deadwood ($d \geq 25$ cm; $d \geq 20$)	57	40	1 - 10	11 - 30	31 - 40	40 <
Small canopy gaps	12	8	1	2 - 3	4 - 5	5 <
Large canopy gaps	3	2	1 or 4 <	2	3	4
Trees with cavities	27	19	1 - 5	6 - 10	11 - 15	15 <
Trees with polypore mushrooms	5	4	1 - 5	6 - 10	11 - 15	15 <
Points:			3	2	3	12
Total points (sum):			20 points			

Low	Average	Good	Excellent
1 – 7 points	8 - 15 points	16 - 23 points	24 + points

Species diversity in Living Forest

- Monitored only by expert
- Focus on fungi, lichens, bryophytes, and vascular plants
- > 50 woodland key habitat species
- Red Data Book:
 - 1 critically endangered (CR)
 - 12 endangered (EN)
 - 30 vulnerable (VU)
 - 15 near threatened (NT)



Solorina saccata
2nd record in Latvia (CR)



Erastia ochraceolateritia
3rd record in Latvia

Survey of LF participants (2026, 79%)

- Experience after 3 years in LF programme
- In cooperation with Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences
- 61% satisfied, 35% rather satisfied with participation in Living Forest
- 74% would like to continue participating in LF, 21% are unsure, 4% would not like to continue
- 21% would like their forest to become part of a permanently protected area
- Does retaining deadwood in the forest contribute to forest biodiversity?
 - LF participants - 83% (yes)
 - Forest owners in traditional protected areas - 48% (yes)



What did you like most about LIVING FOREST?



What didn't you like about LIVING FOREST?



Demonstration of sustainable forest management on private lands

- 5 forest management demonstration territories
- forest owner's perspective
- peer-to-peer learning
- education and experience exchange platform
- nature friendly forest management practices
- forest owners, forestry advisors, biodiversity experts, consultants, forest management companies, students



Īpašums "Zvejnieki"



Īpašums "Riekstiņi"



Īpašums "Pūpoli 2"



Īpašums "Mazjāņi"



Īpašums "Rūķmuiža"

Lessons learned

Biodiversity in private forests:

- ▼ Private forests have strong biodiversity conservation potential:
 - species diversity
 - improvements in all elements of forest structures

Monitoring:

- ▼ Which elements of forest structure are suitable for landowner monitoring?
 - large dimension trees, deadwood - yes
 - canopy gaps, trees with cavities, trees with polypore mushrooms – somewhat complicated
- ▼ To what extent should private landowners be involved in monitoring?
 - for education and adaptation of forestry practices
 - not for support payment calculation (if result-based approach)

Lessons learned

Advisory support and education:

- ❖ Importance of on-site consultation. Probably the most important aspect.
- ❖ Private forest owners rely primarily on information from forestry institutions rather than nature conservation institutions, including on nature conservation issues – cooperation with forest advisors essential
- ❖ The role of forestry service providers

Financial support:

- ❖ Individually calculated support, but with some challenges (e.g. for aspen forests)
- ❖ How should support be calculated? Biodiversity value vs. potential forestry income
- ❖ How to reward biodiversity and presence of rare species?
- ❖ Potential for result-based support mechanism: large trees + deadwood

Lessons learned

Social aspects:

- ✓ Private landowners are very heterogeneous community
- ✓ Social, trust, and communication issues are as important as ecological outcomes
- ✓ Landowners' right to make their own decisions
- ✓ Deadwood, non-intervention acceptance

Governance and administrative perspective:

- ✓ The role of voluntary mechanisms in biodiversity conservation policy
- ✓ Effective use of existing databases
- ✓ Long-term commitment
- ✓ Success - exemption from personal income tax. Law On Personal Income Tax:
<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/56880-par-iedzivotaju-ienakuma-nodokli>

<https://youtu.be/oN3THgfeXng?si=t8LsoAb53ygPh5> x



Projekts "Natura 2000 aizsargājamo teritoriju pārvaldības un apsaimniekošanas optimizācija" (LIFE19IPE/LV/000010 LIFE-IP LatViaNature) tiek īstenots ar Eiropas Savienības LIFE programmas un Valsts reģionālās attīstības aģentūras finansiālu atbalstu. Informācija atspoguļo tikai projekta LIFE IP LatViaNature īstenošanu redzējumu, Eiropas Klimata, infrastruktūras un vides izpildāģentūra nav atbildīga par šeit sniegtās informācijas iespējamo izmantojumu.



Thank you!