



Visitor monitoring and management in protected and recreational areas in Estonia

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- **The State Forest Management Centre (RMK) is the agency responsible for the management of about a half (1.08 million hectares) of the total forested area in Estonia (2.2 million hectares). In addition to forest regeneration, silvicultural activities and timber production, RMK has also been responsible for the development of diverse opportunities for outdoor activities in recreational areas in state forests since 1997.**
- **As of February 2009 RMK is also charged with visitor management of protected nature objects.**



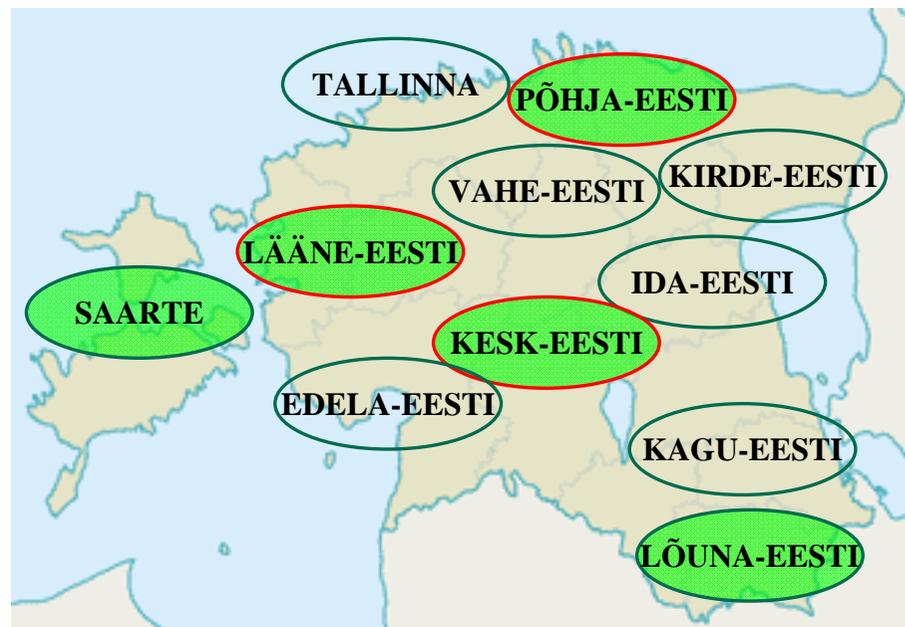
- **The goal of the Nature Management operation area is to contribute with its activities to growing awareness and sustaining of nature among and by the population, and thereby reduce the impacts involved in the (recreational) use of nature on the ecosystem, improving people's health and providing satisfaction through the possibility of nature recreation based on everyman's right in recreation areas and protected areas.**



- **PLACE – planning, establishing and managing recreational landscapes**
 - monitoring and surveys
 - management plan
 - general plans and designs
 - building the infrastructure
 - maintaining the infrastructure
 - landscape protection activities
- **INFORMATION – informing the general public of recreation opportunities**
 - directing information in the landscape
 - information desks
 - home page
 - publications
 - events, campaigns in the media
- **ATTITUDE – shaping sustainable attitudes to land use**
 - nature study programs
 - permanent exhibitions
 - competitions



- 13 RMK recreational areas, 5 national parks and recreational facilities on more than 40 other protected areas
- 669 recreational facilities, including
 - 1735 km of marked nature trails
- 22 nature centres and houses
- The number of visits to RMK recreational areas and protected areas in 2009 will probably be 1.2-1.3 million
- The number of visits to RMK information desks from May 15 to September 15 was 52 000
- 30 000 people have participated in the events and programs organised in nature centres



In order to form an efficient basis for the further development of RMK recreational areas and protected areas, taking account of the visitor needs and the amount of visitors and for the supporting funding plans at the same time ensuring the preservation of the recreational values of landscapes, RMK has applied visitor and environmental impact monitoring system.

- To establish the motivation, preferences and the needs of visitors and changes in their needs RMK periodically conducts visitor surveys.
- To find out the number and distribution of visits RMK continuously conducts visitor counting.
- To determine the condition of recreational forests and the direction and amount of changes RMK orders assessment of environmental impacts of recreation from Estonian Centre of Forest Protection and Silviculture.
- To find out the attitudes of population and local residents RMK orders supporting and background surveys from different research companies.



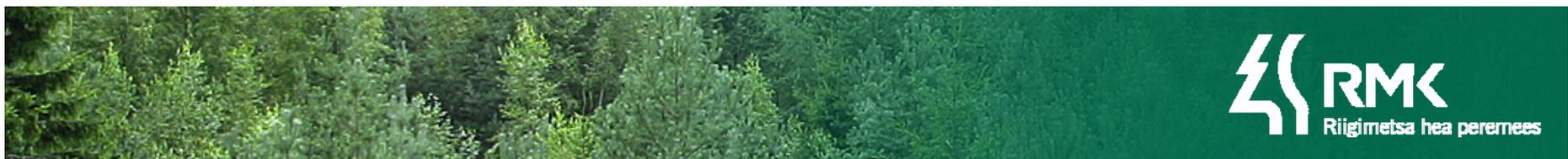
- **Visitor surveys in RMK recreational areas have been conducted in 2002, 2003 and 2006**
- **In 2010 there will be next round of visitor surveys conducted**
- **Visitor surveys are carried out at the same year on all recreational areas of RMK and on protected areas and they are carried out on the same bases**
- **The visitor survey method used is onsite guided survey which is described in the manual “Visitor monitoring in nature areas”**



- **Visitor counting is continuously conducted in all RMK recreational areas since 2002**
- **In 2009 RMK installed first counters also on the protected nature objects which RMK took over in 2009**
- **As of 2009, there are 116 electronic counters installed in RMK recreational areas and protected areas**
- **The installation of counters, taking counter readings, the maintenance, calibration of counters and extrapolating the point counting results is done as described in the manual “Visitor monitoring in nature areas”**



- **Assessment of environmental impacts in RMK recreational areas is conducted by the Estonian Centre of Forest Protection and Silviculture since 2002.**
- **The survey has been conducted on all recreational areas of RMK, the round of repeat surveys has began. As of 2010 protected areas will be included.**
- **The method is specially worked out for recreational areas of RMK – trail and campsite monitoring methods**



The results of the visitor survey:

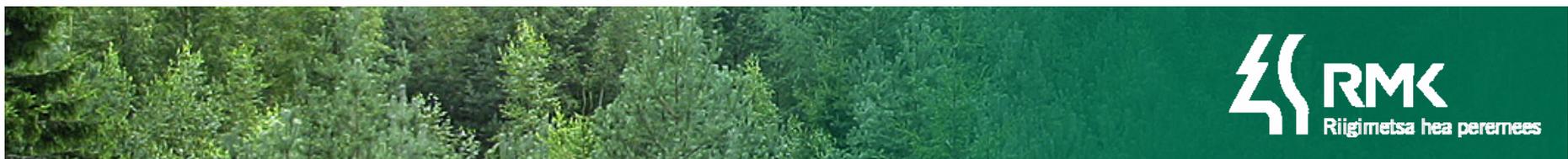
- the public is not aware of the opportunities offered for outdoor recreation in state forests and
- does not use the public information channels
- drawbacks in signage and maps of recreational areas

Utilization of visitor information:

- information desks were established in recreational areas
- the website was updated
- leaflets and maps of the recreational areas were issued
- events were organised to increase the awareness of the public of the present outdoor recreation opportunities
- the development of the principles for the uniform guidance and signage system was undertaken



- **Visitor monitoring in RMK recreational areas and protected areas is conducted on the same basis, the manager itself conducts visitor monitoring and it has been adjusted to Estonian circumstances**
- **There is a common database of the visitor monitoring statistics of RMK recreational areas and protected areas in Estonia**
- **The different surveys and their results are dealt with in a complex way**



- In 2008 RMK applied a continuous environmental status monitoring system
 - to continuously perform preventive landscape protection works
- In June 2008 RMK published the manual “Visitor monitoring in nature areas” in Estonian
 - RMK has been using onsite guided visitor survey method and automatic visitor counting methods described in the manual since 2002, now our managers onsite have a thorough guiding material in their mother tongue
 - internationally acknowledged methodologies ensure the national acceptance of visitor information of RMK
 - a teaching material in the universities
 - available for the public in the libraries and on the web
- In April 2009 RMK took into use a new application KÜSI for entering and processing the visitor information
 - we bought the application which was specially developed for Metsähallitus from Finland
 - the user interface was translated to Estonian and a few customisations were made to the application to meet the needs of RMK
 - the following data is entered to KÜSI: visitor survey and counting data of RMK recreational areas and protected areas, visitor, group and contact counting data of nature centres of RMK
 - the old visitor survey and counting data will be converted to be available in KÜSI



In order to efficiently plan recreational landscapes, it is planned to create different synergies between different survey and monitoring data:

- **To designate the most suitable, durable types of landscapes for different types of uses;**
- **To specify the optimum capacity for different types of landscape for different types of uses;**
- **To specify the need for infrastructure that would guarantee landscape protection on different types of landscape in the case of different types of uses and capacities.**



Thank you

