

# Healthy Parks, Healthy People Finland

*Matti Tapaninen, Metsähallitus, Parks & Wildlife Finland, matti.tapaninen@metsa.fi*

*Liisa Kajala, Metsähallitus, Parks & Wildlife Finland, liisa.kajala@metsa.fi*

*Heidi Lumijärvi, Metsähallitus, Parks & Wildlife Finland, heidi.lumijarvi@metsa.fi*

*Carina Wennström, Metsähallitus, Parks & Wildlife Finland, carina.wennstrom@metsa.fi*

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## Introduction

Taking inspiration from the growing evidence base, and from the work of Australia's Parks Victoria in the development of a Healthy Parks Healthy People approach, Parks & Wildlife Finland (PWF) is implementing a national Healthy Parks Healthy People strategy to help address health challenges (Metsähallitus, Parks & Wildlife Finland 2017). The environmental resources on which delivery depends are based largely within park management bodies, but the strategy works with business innovators, healthcare practitioners, scientists and NGOs to foster better health of individuals and communities. The strategy is being implemented in locations all around Finland and many inspiring nature-based solutions have been developed – examples of which will be used in the presentation. The presentation will also address the issue of evaluating the impacts of the strategy and the health outcomes from specific projects and programmes.

The presentation will highlight that there is very strong business case in the relationship of biodiversity and human health. Nature-connected innovations in health care systems, wellbeing tourism and various approaches like Healthy parks - Healthy people, health walks, Green Care and green prescriptions already support this business case. Health is considered as the most basic human right and an important indicator of sustainable development. Biodiversity and health linkages are also crucial elements in several Sustainable Development Goals.

International cooperation and sharing good practice plays a crucial role in achieving health benefits from nature as the challenge is global. There is a clear message here for public health fora to include park managers, as parks and greenspace not only protect the essential systems of life and biodiversity, but they are also a fundamental setting for health promotion and the creation of wellbeing.

## Content of Healthy Parks Healthy People Finland

Parks & Wildlife Finland manages all of Finland's national parks, other state-owned protected areas, wilderness areas, national hiking areas and public waters. PWF works to improve public well-being and the viability of tourism, as well as the state of biodiversity in Finland. In 2010 PWF Finland launched Finland's Healthy Parks Healthy People programme with the overall aim that *Public health will improve as people get out into natural settings, enjoy positive and genuine experiences, and improve their physical health through a wide range of outdoor activities.*

In 2016 PWF launched a new and more comprehensive programme with overall aim being ***Finland's diverse natural environment improves the health and well-being of its people - The Finns are an active, outdoor people, for whom nature is an essential part of everyday life and leisure time. Their social, physical and mental well-being has improved due to the varied Finnish wilderness and their active relationship with nature.*** The programme was renewed as PWF realized it's role better in improving public health:

1. Guardian of the diverse natural environment and a provider of high-quality services that meet the needs of recreation, tourism, hiking, hunting and fishing.
2. Inspiring people to go out into the natural environment and strengthen their relationship with nature
3. An active developer, partner and coordinator in collaboration.

The programme has several goals, as well as measures to attain these goals. Measures are included in three main themes: 1) from nearby nature to national parks, 2) everyone outdoors, and 3) results based on communications and cooperation. The programme is implemented all around Finland, and it also has strong national and international dimensions. One outcome is new methodology to improve our understanding of health benefits of green settings and our ability to monitor related progress. International cooperation has played crucial role, as this challenge is global in scope. In addition, research institutes are key partners, for example in the field of indicator based management. Together with research partners PWF has been able to start the monitoring of health benefits. Communicating these results is an important part of the programme (Metsähallitus 2018a, Metsähallitus 2018b).

Healthy Parks, Healthy People Finland especially stresses the importance of biodiversity and good access to nature in preventing diseases and in overall wellbeing of people and societies. Nature connection should be available to all, and in addition, a special focus needs to be geared to vulnerable groups who may have strong barriers in the use of natural settings and who may need most support to reach natural environments.

## References

- Metsähallitus, Parks & Wildlife Finland 2017, *Healthy Parks, Healthy People - Health and Wellbeing 2025 programme*. <https://julkaisut.metsa.fi/julkaisut/show/2112>, accessed April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2018
- Metsähallitus 2018a, v. <http://www.metsa.fi/web/en/healthbenefitsfromnature>, accessed April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2018
- Metsähallitus 2018b, *Health and Well-Being Outdoors*. <http://www.nationalparks.fi/en/hikinginfinland/healthandwellbeing>, accessed April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2018