

27: Linaküla-Sääreküla

27.1 Change of the site by project activities:

The project area of Linaküla-Sääreküla beholds 76 ha of coastal meadows in Kihnu island, SW of Estonia in Pärnu Bay of Baltic Sea. Due to its remote location and aging community with special cultural heritage (acknowledged also as UNESCO intangible heritage) the protected area management in Kihnu has been a challenge.

When the project started in 2005 only 20 ha of coastal meadows were managed on the site and the local community grazed there about 20 cattle (mostly dairy cattle). With the help of the LIFE-BaltCoast project it has been possible to increase the managed area to 52,8 ha. It has been possible by convincing the local community to start breeding beef cattle and encouraging them to apply for different subsidies available for the semi-natural habitat management. Also the project has had direct impacts like purchase of cattle, removal of unwanted vegetation and building of fences.

The project has had a strong effect also to the management quality. In 2005 the grazed areas were managed with very low grazing pressure and in the areas that were mowed sometimes the hay was left behind. In the present moment the grazing density is not sufficient yet, but has had a strong growth in quality (see figure 1 and 2).

As a result for grazing with improved intensity the natural elements of coastal meadow are restoring, for example the natural depressions formerly covered with high vegetation (reed etc) are now opened. In the spring 2012 the Dunlin habitat was in favourable condition.

27.2 Remaining challenges and actions:

- Information board will be set up
- Reed beds and juniper bushes will be cut
- Management plan will be approved
- Continuous improvement in management



Figure 1 Project site in July 2006



Figure 2 Project site in July 2010 (same location)



Figure 3 Farmers from Kihnu visiting beef cattle breeders in Matsalu National Park

27.3 Public perception:

As said before in 3.1 the project has had a strong effect on the management quality. Before the project the management was carried out on the minimal required level to get the management subsidy. At the present moment the main partner in the site (cooperative farm of Kihnu people – Kihnu Majanduse OÜ) is aware of the protection values and their management needs. Also the landowners of the site have started to value more the meadow management, though the aging community wishes to see traditional breeds (dairy cattle) rather than beef cattle as the grazers of the area, but they do understand that dairy cattle breeding in such conditions is not viable.



Figure 4 Work camp to remove juniper from Dunlin habitat in 2009

In addition to the involvement of local community the project has also raised wider awareness on coastal meadow management with organizing work camps in cooperation with Estonian Fund for Nature. The participants of the camps come all over Estonia, during a weekend they work for the site and hear why the area has to be protected and what kind of management is needed for the protection values. In Linaküla-Sääreküla project site there has been 3 such work camps.

In 2009 Environmental Board carried out a survey to map the public perception of the protection values in Kihnu coastal meadows and most of the people who answered acknowledged and valued the protection aims of the meadows.