

Forest and wildfires



Threat assessment: The occurrence of a large-scale forest or landscape fire in Estonia is unlikely. However, as climate warming continues, the risk of forest and grassland fires is increasing. Compared with the previous assessment, the threat evaluation has not changed.

The fire hazard in forests depends on the forest site type, age, and the tree species growing there, on the basis of which forests are classified into fire hazard classes. The highest fire hazard class applies to coniferous forest stands, while deciduous forests are categorised as having the lowest fire hazard.

According to data from the past three years, in about 95% of forest and landscape fires the burned area has remained below three hectares. Larger fires have been prevented by active prevention work and by the rapid and appropriate response of rescue teams. Fires in which the burned area was at least 10 hectares numbered 19 in total, representing only 1% of all forest and landscape fires. Since 2018, no large-scale forest or landscape fires have occurred in Estonia.

Weather conditions are a key factor in forest and grassland fires. Low rainfall, strong winds, high air temperatures, and low humidity increase fire risk and promote the rapid and extensive spread of fires.

THREATS

- ✓ In nearly half of cases, the cause of forest and wildfires remains undetermined. Of the identified causes, only 1–3% were the result of natural phenomena, meaning that most of the identified causes were human-related. The most common among these are non-compliance with fire safety requirements when making bonfires and the burning of dry grass. Other identified causes include electrical equipment and installation faults, smoking, children playing with open flames, and barbecuing, although these occur less frequently.
- ✓ Fires started by motor vehicles are mostly linked to agricultural work, for example sparks from tractors or combine harvesters, peat processing, and driving motor vehicles on peat surfaces.
- ✓ Most forest and grassland fires occur primarily in Harju County (34%), Ida-Viru County (18%), Pärnu County (8%), and Tartu County (8%), where population density is also higher than average.

- ✓ Heatwaves and droughts are becoming more frequent and lasting longer. As a result, in the future the number of forest and grassland fires and the extent of burned areas may increase. The projected rise in the number of fire hazard days is expected to stem mainly from increased evaporation in a warmer climate, which reduces soil moisture content. In addition, earlier snowmelt in the future could cause the fire season to begin earlier.

GUIDELINES

If you discover a forest or wildfire:

- ✓ Immediately notify the emergency center by calling 112, where the fire has broken out and what is burning.
- ✓ Warn people in danger.
- ✓ If you are sure of your safety, start extinguishing the fire or preventing the spread of the fire as much as possible.

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