

Setting Up an Advisory Service for Semi-Natural Grassland Owners: Practices from Estonia

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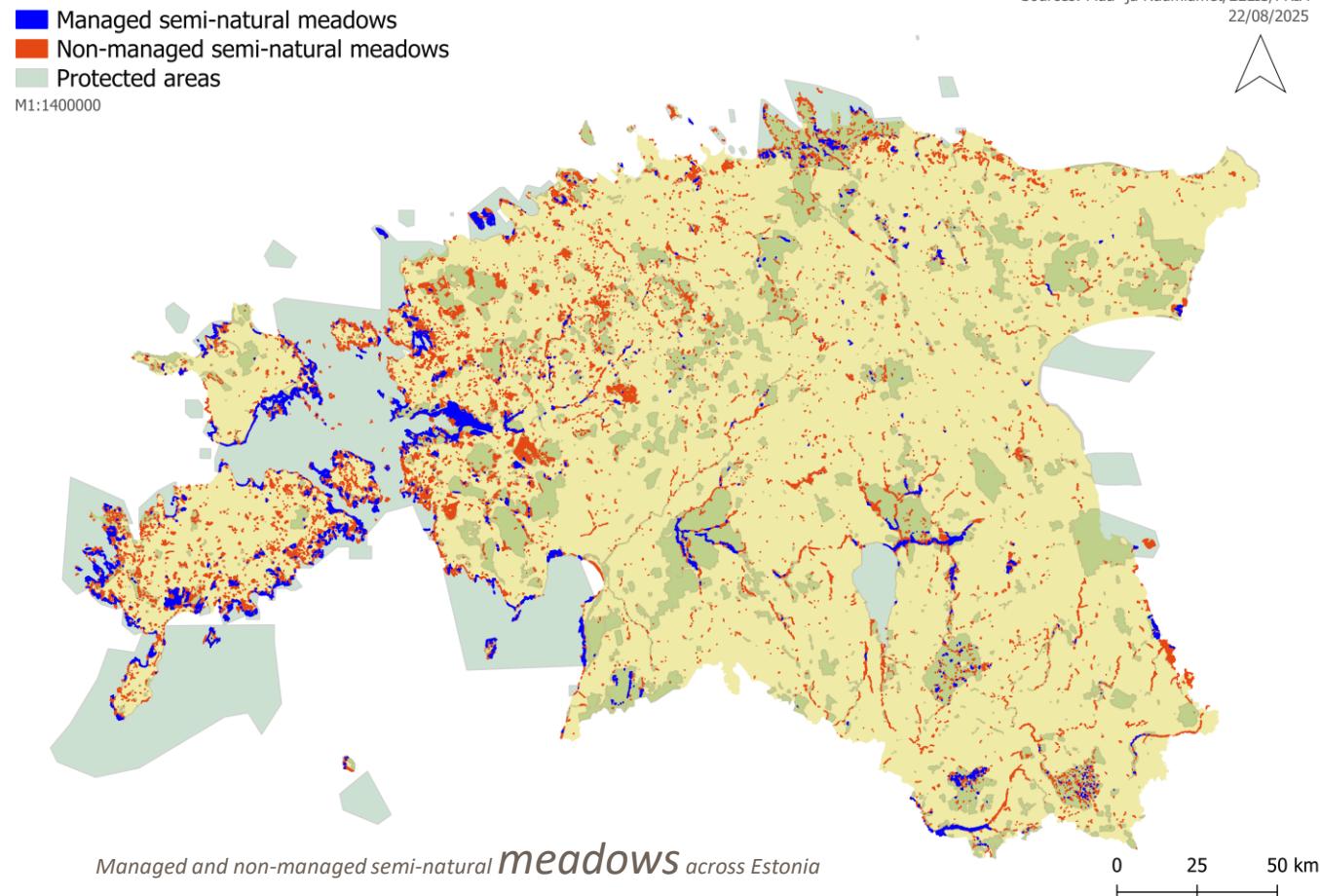
Why semi-natural grasslands matter

- Biodiversity hotspots
- Exceptional species richness
- Multiple ecosystem benefits
- Cultural heritage

Estimated need in protected areas:

66 000-86 000 ha

**of managed semi-natural grasslands to ensure
long-term ecological functioning¹**



Managed and non-managed semi-natural meadows across Estonia

~1000

farmers involved

42 000 ha

under management

¹ Helm, A. & Toussaint, A. (2020). *Poollooduslike koosluste ökoloogilise toimimise hinnang* [Assessment of the Ecological Functioning of Semi-natural Grasslands]. University of Tartu

The advisory service has three main targets

1. Find new landowners

Bring more areas of semi-natural grassland habitats into active management.

2. Highlight the value of the land

Help landowners recognize the ecological value of their land.

3. Provide advice to landowners

Provide expert support for restoration and management, subsidies and procurements.



Core idea: consultation is not a one-way information channel. It is a working partnership.

How the service works



The advisory service is carried out by the **Environmental Board**.

Direct outreach

monthly emails
and follow-up calls



News sharing

e-newsletter to 6000 owners
and
coffee mornings, 2–3x/year



Cooperation

Rental web-application
for offering and finding
land



Capacity building

trainings for
value assessment
and
"Farmer to farmer" studytrips



Recognition

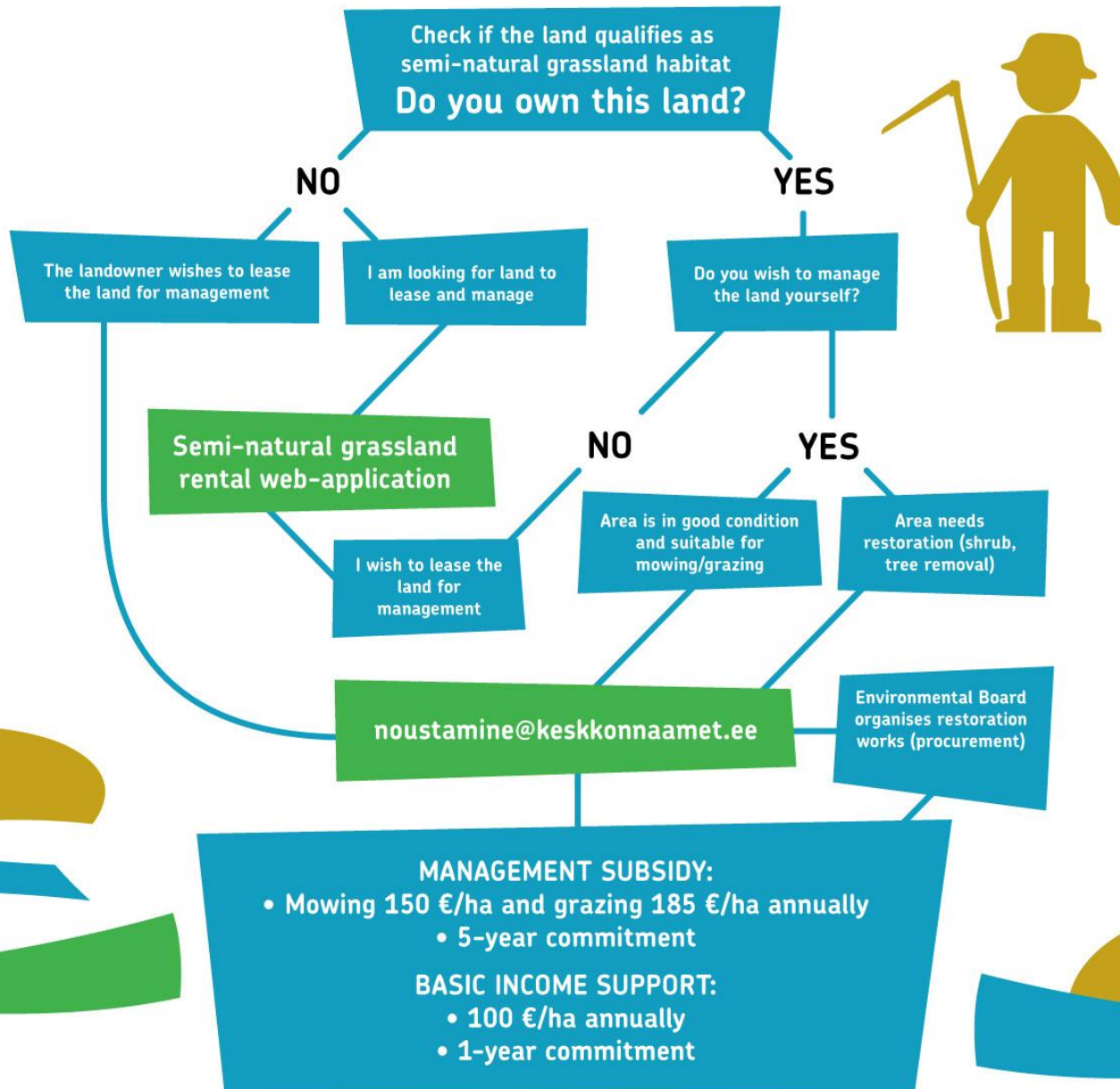
award ceremony
every second year



Financing guidance

clear overview of subsidies
and procurements

How the service works



Support for decision is made practical: landowner can check the value of his land, learn about rental options and understand subsidy schemes.

Our partners in the field



Recognition strengthens the partnership

- Recognise best grassland managers who preserve species-rich habitats
- Strengthen the network of semi-natural grassland managers in Estonia
- Strengthen cooperation between land managers and the state
- Promote semi-natural grassland management and raise its visibility

“The consultation service has been a great success... I now feel I have an ally in the Environmental Board.”

Mario Talvist, grassland manager (middle in the photo)

Main challenges in engaging landowners

Contact and ownership

- Many co-owners → complex and slow decision-making
- Owners living abroad or passive owners → difficult contact

Support needs

- Elderly landowners → more explanation and practical support needed
- New and small-scale owners → more systematic and continuous support needed

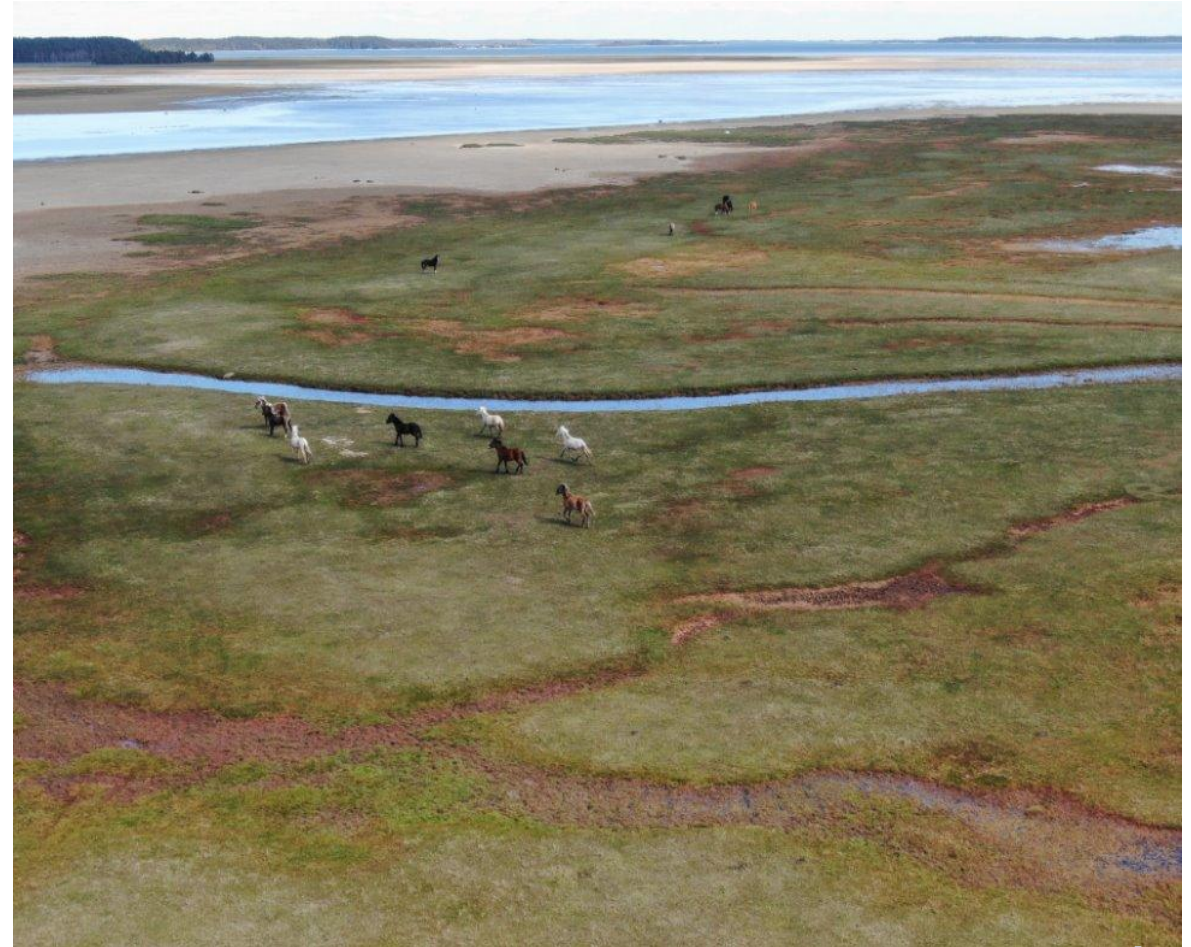
Management and restoration

- Complex information → subsidy rules and management conditions
- Finding suitable and trustworthy managers

Key takeaways

- Use targeted, direct communication to reach landowners with restoration potential.
- Combine ecological advice with practical step-by-step information and financing guidance.
- Build cooperation channels between owners and managers.
- Recognise good managers publicly to strengthen long-term stewardship.

Effective consultation is more than sharing information.
It is a partnership that helps landowners make better choices for nature.



Coastal meadows of Hiiumaa

Thank you!

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LIFE-IP ForEst&FarmLand

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