

Nature conservation systems: governance models

GEOSITES

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Finland, Latvia, and Lithuania operate nature conservation systems shaped by shared EU membership and Baltic ecosystems, focusing on Natura 2000 networks for habitats and birds.

All three prioritize forest and wetland protection but differ in scale due to Finland's boreal dominance versus the Baltic states' temperate agricultural influences, with protected areas covering 13% in Finland, 18 % in Latvia, and 18% in Lithuania.





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Nature
Conservation Agency
Republic of Latvia

Nature Conservation in Latvia

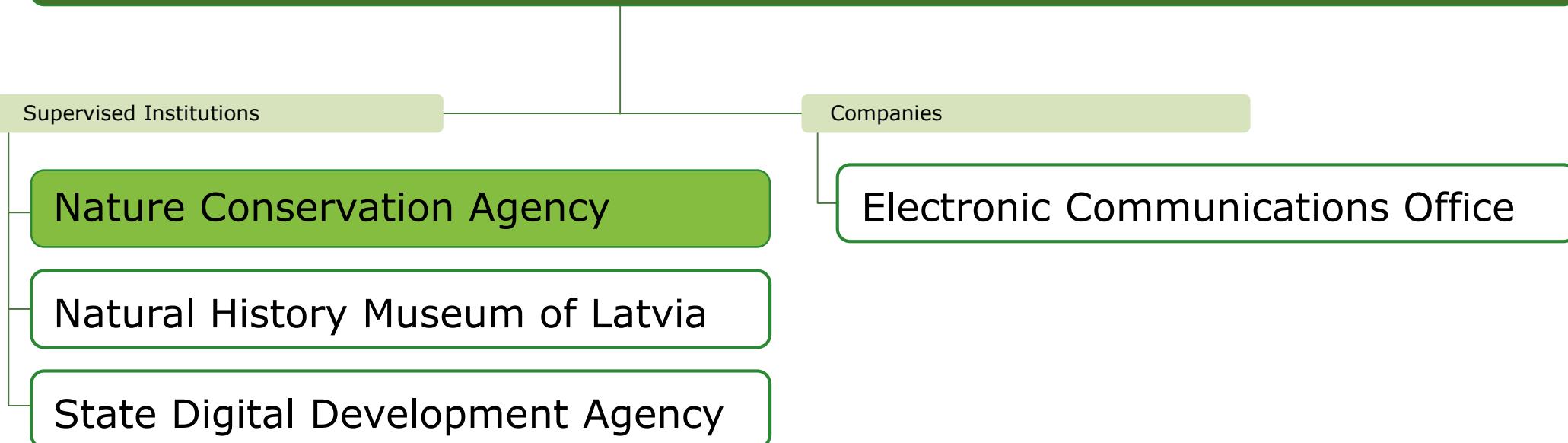


Who are we?

Nature Conservation Agency – Governmental Organisation

Latvia – Lithuania

The Ministry of Smart Administration and Regional Development





Balance the needs of nature and people, preserving natural values as an integral part of a high-quality human living environment

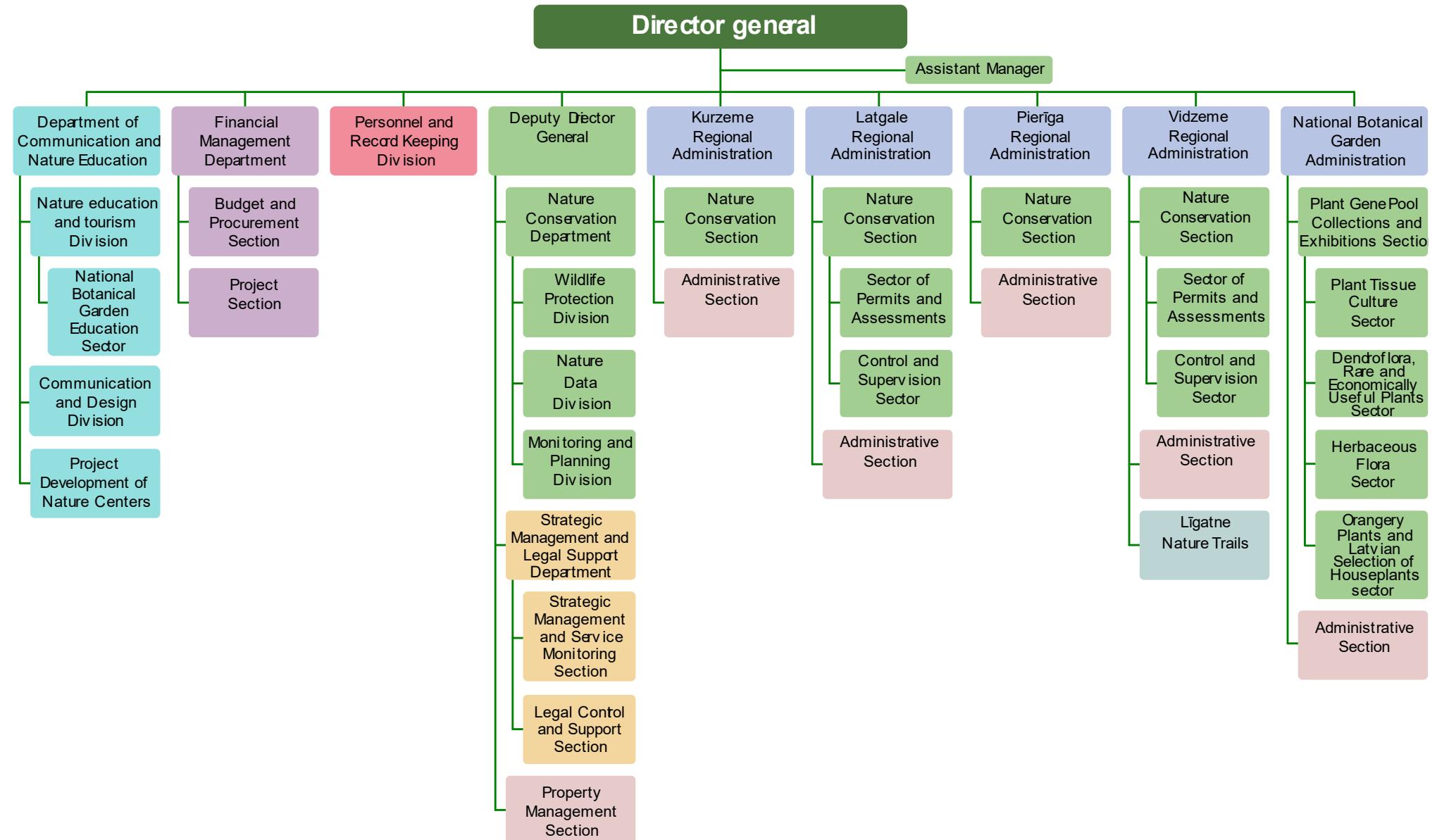


A center of competence and industry leader in nature conservation with a professional, motivated and creative team



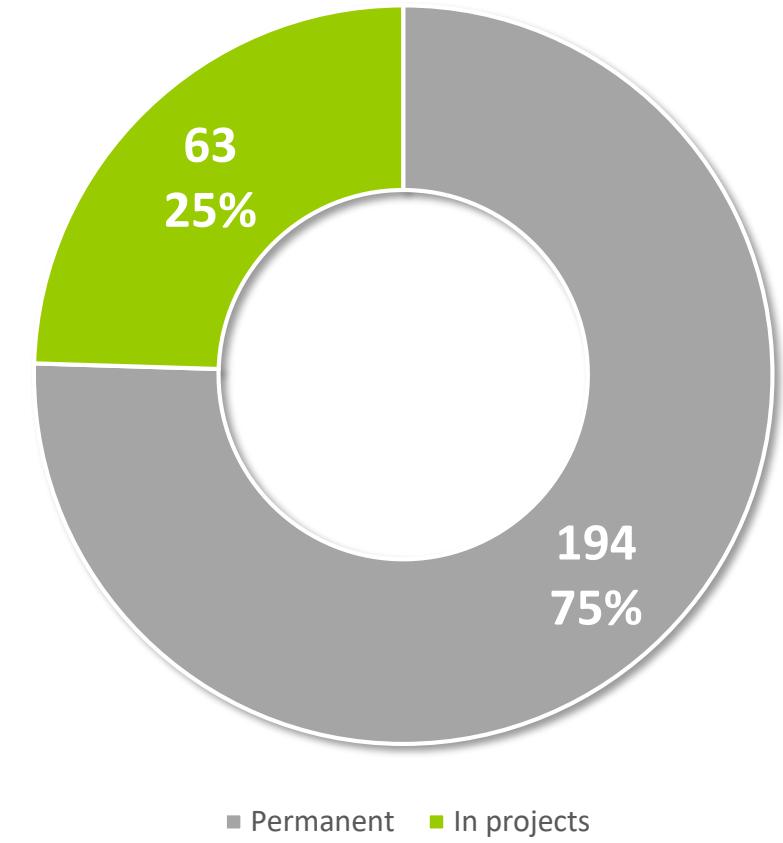
Collaboration
Respect
Professionalism
Loyalty
Growth

General Structure



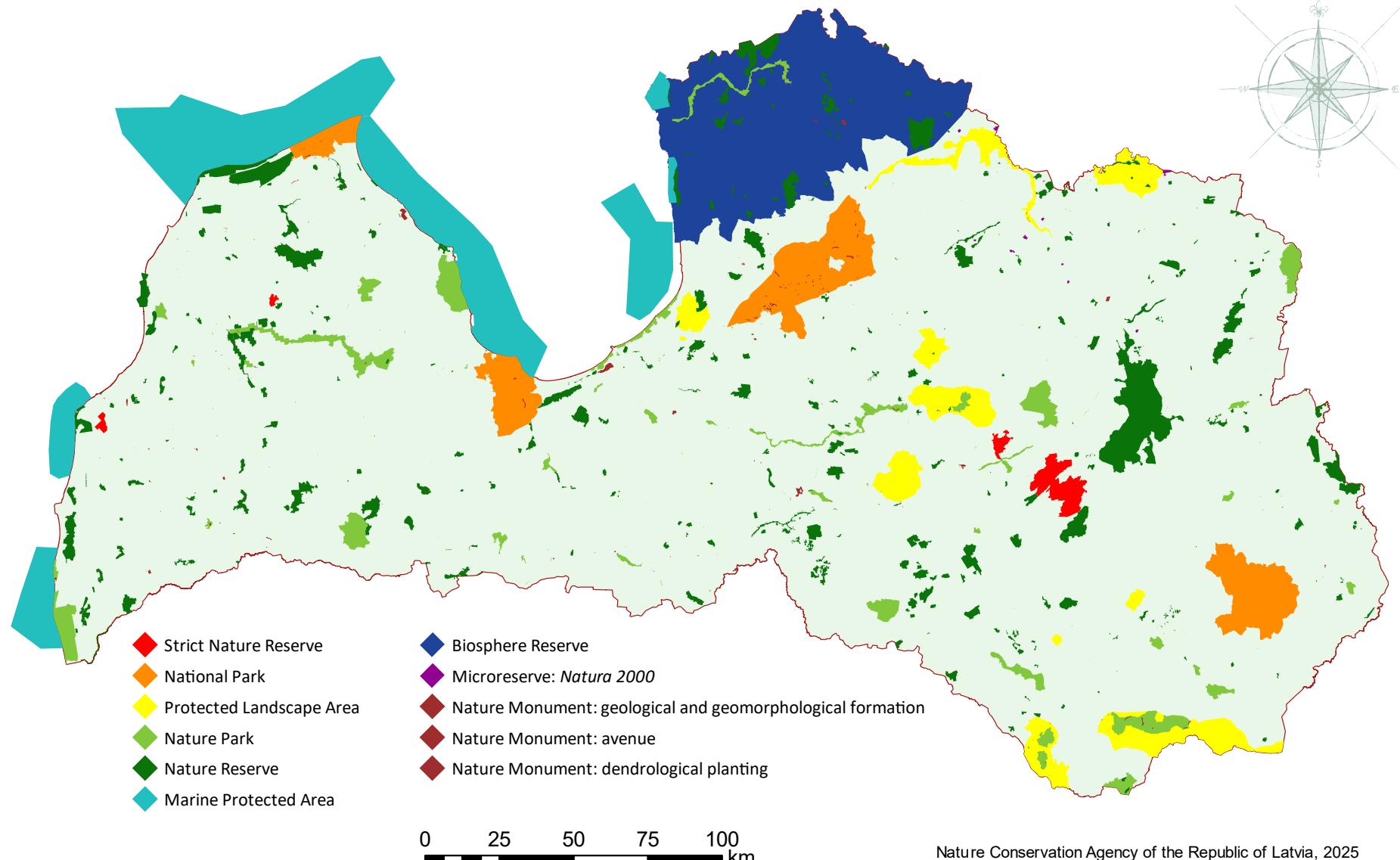
Latvia – Lithuania

257 employed

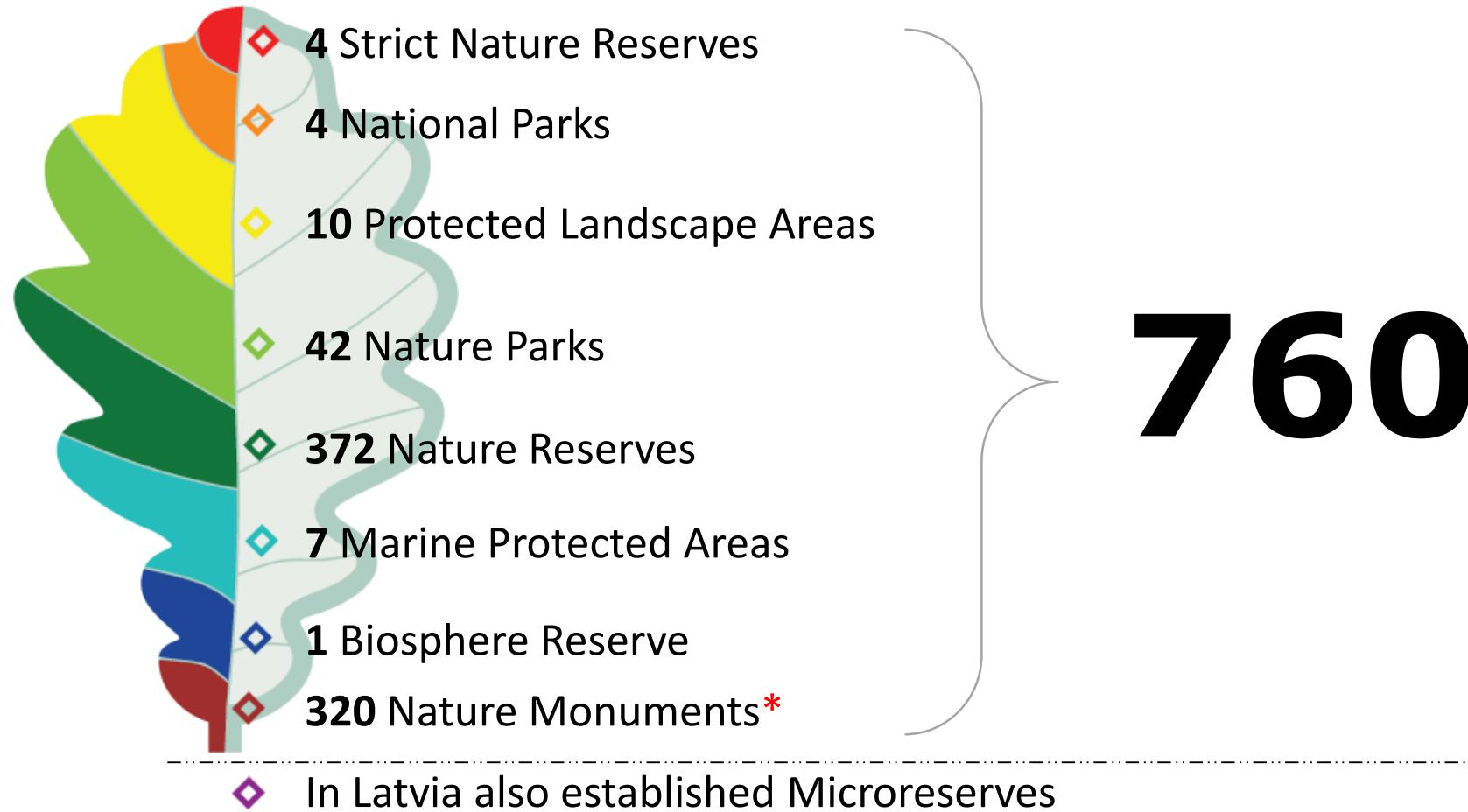


Specially Protected Nature Territories

Specially Protected Nature Territories

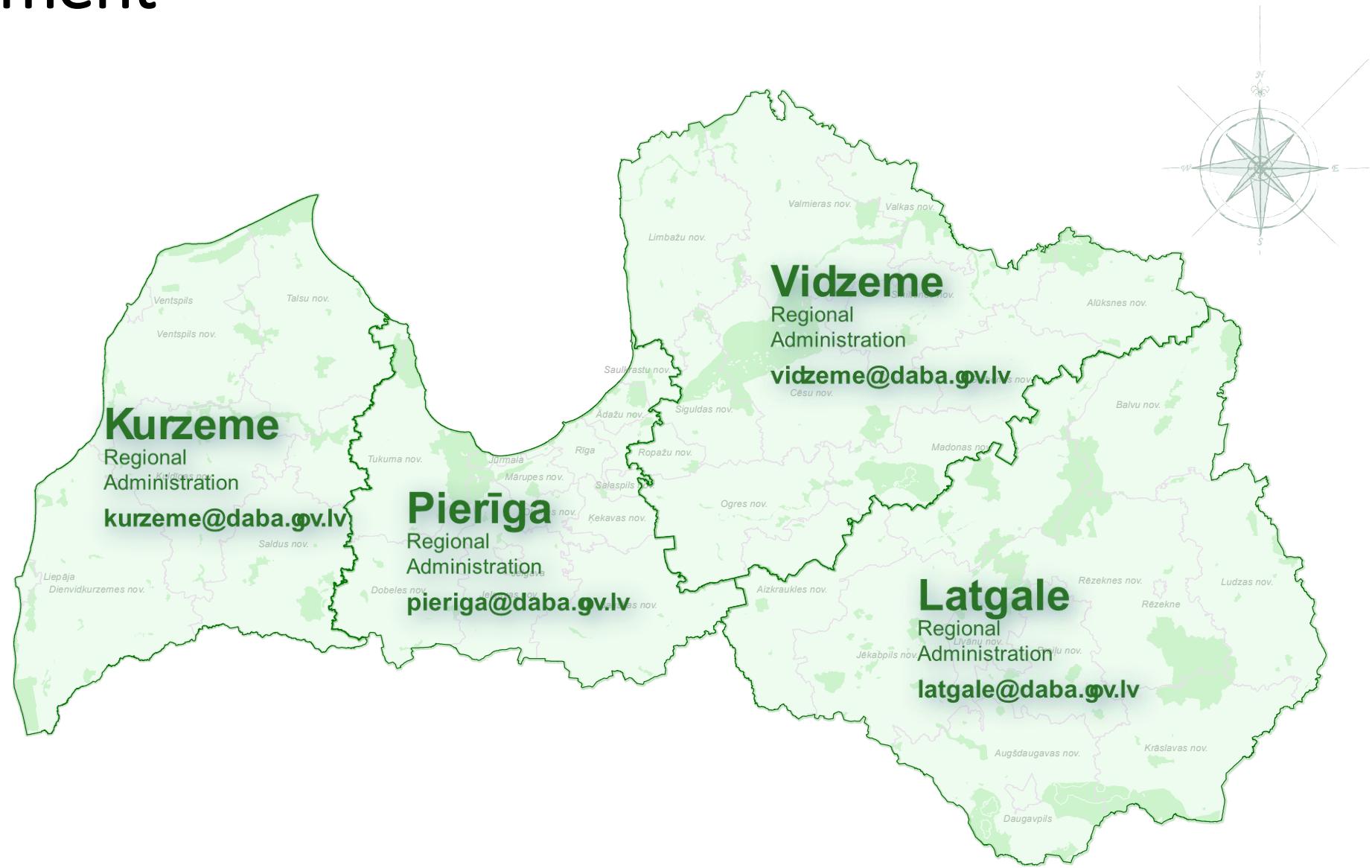


Specially Protected Nature Territories



Management

Latvia – Lithuania



Main areas of activity



Nature
Conservation Agency
Republic of Latvia



Projects

ERAFF

- ⌚ Nature Conservation Plans Development | 01.10.2023.-30.09.2028. | 2 941 177 EUR
- ⌚ Nature Education Centers | 1.09.2024.-31.12.2029. | 9 570 000 EUR

LIFE

- ⌚ LIFE Osmo Baltic | 01.01.2024.-30.06.2030. | 2 784 336,88 EUR
- ⌚ LIFE IS SALACA | 01.10.2023.-30.09.2028. | 1 405 181,78 EUR
- ⌚ LIFE FOR SPECIES | 01.10.2020.-31.12.2025. | 696 846 EUR
- ⌚ LIFE-IP LatViaNature | 01.08.2020.-31.12.2028. | 14 296 648 EUR
- ⌚ LIFE REEF | 01.09.2020.-31.08.2025. | 1 494 404 EUR

TPF

- ⌚ Restoration of Bog Ecosystems | 12.11.2024.-31.12.2029. | 1 764 705,99 EUR



Nature conservation in Lithuania

Lithuania's nature conservation system institutional changes over time

Ancient Baltic (–14th c.)

Sacred protection of nature by belief (alkai, sacred sites)

Feudal (14th–18th c.)

Resource control, protection due to limited access noble hunting forests

Interwar Lithuania (1918–1940)

Modern conservation ideas which led to the first ever reserve (Žuvintas)

Early Soviet period (1940–1960)

Utilitarian protection, hunting reserves due to the need of resources

Late Soviet period (1960–1990)

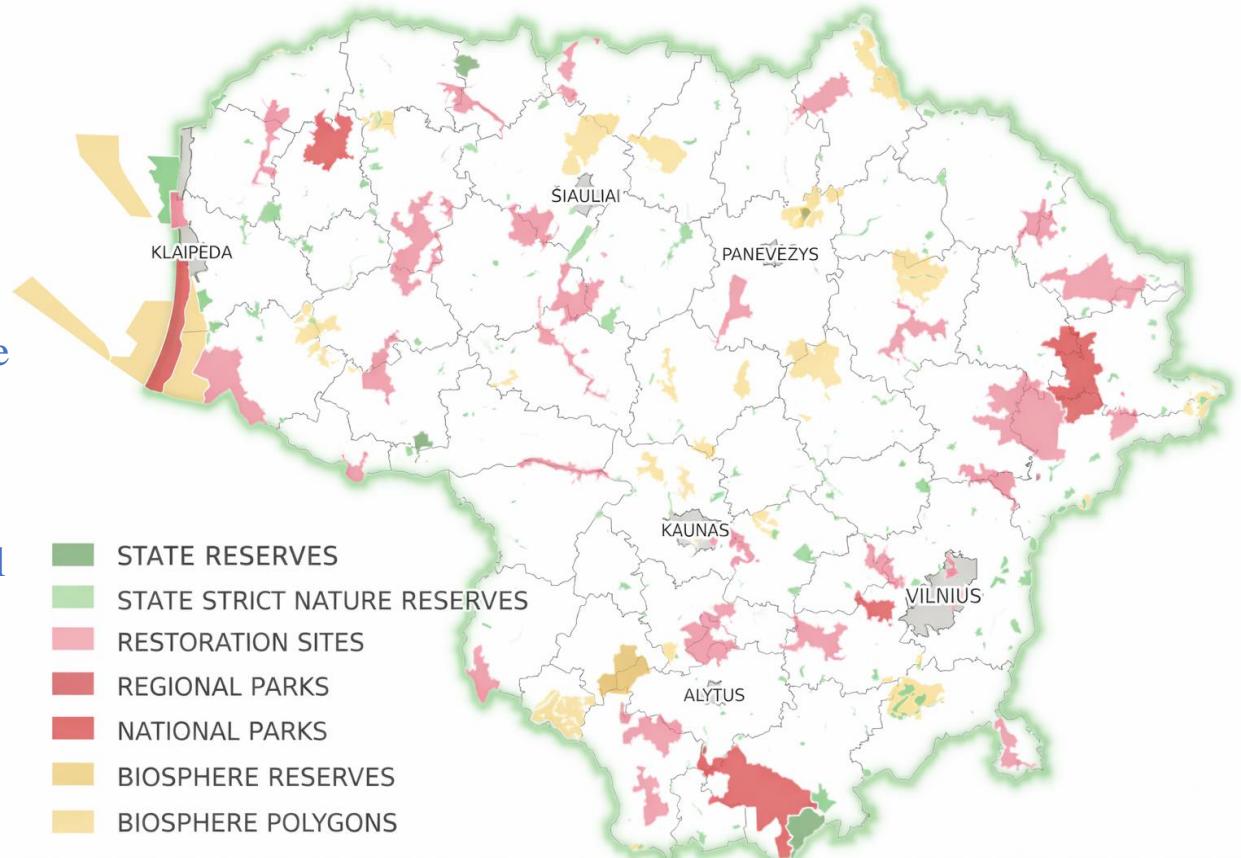
Created a more functional systematic network of conservation, first national park creation in 1974

Current era

Developed an integrated system, multiple national & regional parks, Natura 2000

Protected areas

- **Protected areas of conservational priority**, which protect unique or typical complexes and objects of natural and cultural landscape. Strict reserves (natural and cultural), reserves and objects of natural and cultural heritage are attributed to this category.
- **Protected areas of ecological protection priority**, which are singled out in order to escape a negative effect on protected complexes and objects of natural and cultural heritage or negative impact of anthropogenic objects on the environment. Zones of ecological protection are attributed to this category.
- **Protected areas of recuperational protection**, which are designated for restoration, augmentation and protection of natural resources and genetic plots are attributed to this category.
- **Integrated protected areas**, which include conservational, ecological protection, recuperational and economic zones according to the general programme for protection, management and use. National and regional parks and biosphere monitoring areas (biosphere reserves and biosphere polygons) are attributed to this category.

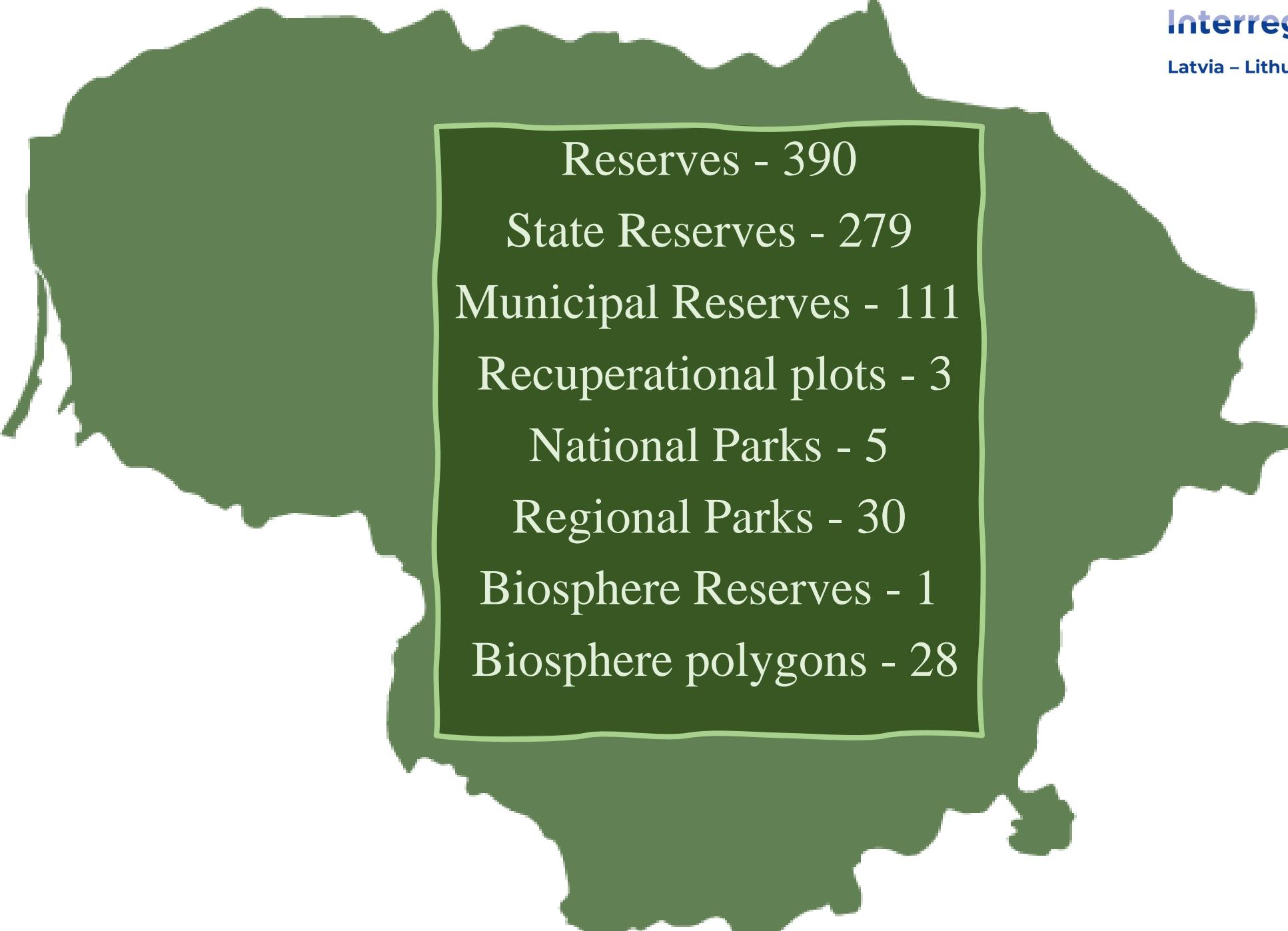




Overview Lithuania's conservation system

Permissions vary strictly by category and zone:

- Strict Reserves: No entry, activities, logging, hunting, or camping;
- Reserves/Heritage objects: Limited access for research/education; economic activities permitted under regulation.
- Ecological protection Zones: Allow regulated farming, forestry, low-impact recreation. Restrict polluting industries, major construction
- Complex Parks/bioshere Polygons: Allowed Eco-tourism, hiking, regulated fishing/hunting, private land uses allowed with permits; management plans balance recreation and biodiversity.



Reserves - 390
State Reserves - 279
Municipal Reserves - 111
Recuperational plots - 3
National Parks - 5
Regional Parks - 30
Biosphere Reserves - 1
Biosphere polygons - 28

Overview Lithuania's conservation system

- Lithuania has **five national parks**, established mainly between the 1970s and 1990s:
- **Aukštaitija National Park** (oldest, established 1974)
- **Dzūkija National Park**
- **Žemaitija National Park**
- **Kuršių Nerija National Park** (Curonian Spit, UNESCO World Heritage Site)
- **Trakai Historical National Park** (unique focus on cultural heritage)

National parks are **multi-purpose**: biodiversity protection, landscape conservation, cultural heritage, recreation, and environmental education.

Unlike “wilderness” parks in Finland, Lithuanian national parks are **inhabited landscapes** with villages, private land, agriculture, and tourism.

National Park Governance Models

Lithuania uses a **centralized but territorially decentralized governance model**:

- **Ministry of the Environment**
 - Sets national policy and legislation
 - Oversees the protected area system
- **State Service for Protected Areas (SSPA)**
 - Central coordinating authority
 - Responsible for strategy, methodological guidance, and system-wide coherence
- **National Park Directorates**
 - Each national park (territory) has its own **directorates**
 - Responsible for day-to-day management, planning, enforcement, visitor management, and stakeholder cooperation, issuing of permits
 - Strictly regulate forest cutting permits to prioritize conservation, with prohibitions or severe restrictions in core protected zones. Permits, when allowed, are issued by the State Forest Service in coordination with park authorities under the Forestry Law.



The main tasks of State Service for Protected Areas



To ensure landscape stability, landscape and biodiversity conservation, protection and rational use of protected areas.

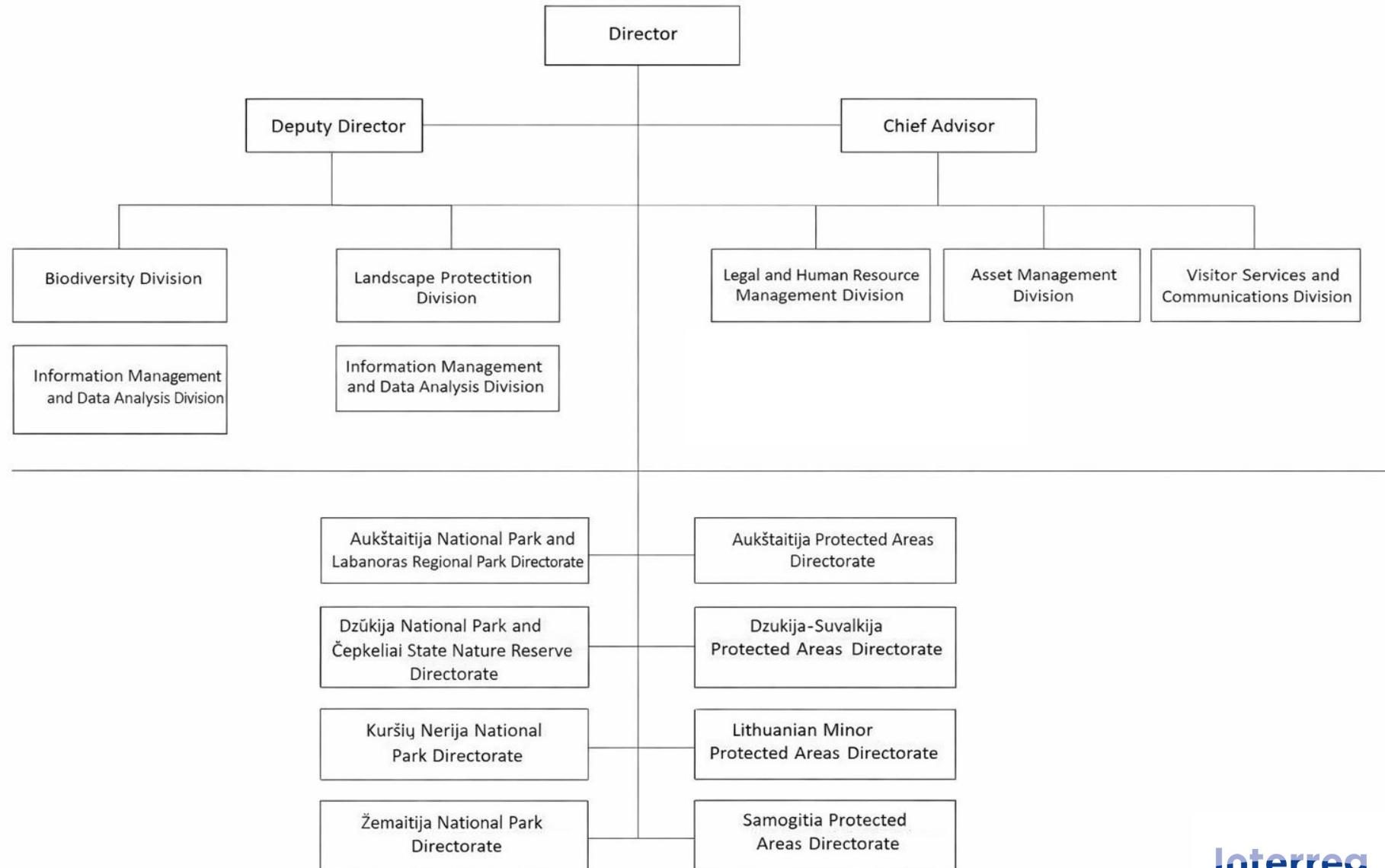


To create conditions for cognitive tourism in protected areas;



To ensure rational use of EU support for protection and management of protected areas.

State service for protected area's structure



A scenic landscape featuring a dense forest of tall, thin coniferous trees reflected in a calm lake in the foreground. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds.

Nature conservation in Finland

Overview Finlands conservation system

The general system of protected areas consists of:

- National Parks: Largest units for representative ecosystems like boreal forests and mires, with management plans balancing research, trails, and permits.
- Wilderness Areas: Remote zones emphasizing natural processes over infrastructure.
- Nature Reserves: Habitat-focused, varying from strict no-entry to monitored uses.

Responsible:
Metsähallitus Parks & Wildlife Finland (state-run enterprise)



Overview Finlands conservation system

Permissions vary strictly by category and zone:

- Strict Reserves: No entry, activities, logging, hunting, or camping;
- Sanctuaries/Heritage: Limited access for research/education; economic activities permitted under regulation.
- Ecological protection Zones: Allow regulated farming, forestry, low-impact recreation. Restrict polluting industries, major construction
- Complex Parks/bioshere Polygons: Allowed Eco-tourism, hiking, regulated fishing/hunting, private land uses allowed with permits; management plans balance recreation and biodiversity.

The main tasks of Metsähallitus regarding nature conservation

Metsähallitus main tasks are the protection of habitats, species and historical sites in state-owned lands, including almost all protected areas in Finland. They safeguard biodiversity and have an important role for Finland strive for carbon neutrality.



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Latvia – Lithuania

Nature conservation model

Metsähallitus, Parks & Wildlife Finland follows the guidelines called the Protected Area Management Principles. The guidelines define the protected area types on state-owned lands, their protection goals and the general principles to be followed in the protected area management.

The protected area management principles are partly determined directly by national legislation and partly by Parks & Wildlife Finland (P&WF) as the landowner and site manager. Many of the principles are also national and regional best practice that has been developed and agreed over time.

Finlands nature conservation system institutional changes over time

Pre-1920s foundations: Early voluntary reserves created to protect pristine forests for research and future generations (e.g., Pallas-Ounastunturi 1907, Pyhä-Häkki 1916).

1920s–1950s establishment: Legal conservation began in 1923; first three national parks founded in 1938; major expansion in 1956 with 17 additional parks on Metsähallitus lands.

1960s–1980s expansion & separation: Large national protection programs for mires, old-growth forests, herb-rich woods, and shores; conservation tasks separated from forestry with a dedicated office in 1981 (later Natural Heritage Services).

1990s–present integration: 1994 restructuring formed Parks & Wildlife Finland, managing 500+ areas over ~17,000 km²; today oversees 12 million hectares, balancing biodiversity conservation, recreation, and sustainable use.