

**The Welfare State Meets the Dichotomy Between Environmental
Preservation and Industrial Development:
The Case of Sweden and its Forest Industry**

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Abstract

Described as a societal cornerstone, forests in Sweden are part of both its history and in the modern day era that is characterized by contemporary challenges such as climate change and globalization. This thesis is a case study that revolves around the dichotomy between conservational interests and industrial interests with a focus on the Swedish forestry sector and its connection to Swedish welfare. The purpose of the research is to further explore how member states' economic reliance on their respective industries is impacting their ability to adhere to environmental policies and legislation from the European Union (EU). By utilizing multilevel governance and advocacy coalition framework as theoretical perspectives, the research uncovers the main coalitions in the debate, the coalition of commercial interests and the coalition of environmental interests. It further explores how these coalitions shape the implementation of the EU's environmental policies with a focus on the Nature Restoration Regulation that was adopted in 2024. The research concluded that it is important for policy-makers to consider the complexity that comes with the social aspects of the Swedish forestry sector, when making new environmental legislations to ensure a fair and effective implementation.

Keywords: *Welfare, Environmental Governance, the EU, the Nature Restoration Regulation, Policy*

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACF	—Advocacy Coalition Framework
EGD	— European Green Deal
EU	— European Union
MLG	— Multilevel Governance
NGO	— Non-governmental Organization
NRR	— Nature Restoration Regulation
SDG	— Sustainable Development Goals
SOU	— Statens Offentliga Utredningar
UN	— United Nations

1. Introduction

1.1 Introducing the thesis

”A Societal Cornerstone”. This is how the Svenska Cellulosa Aktiebolaget (SCA) describes Swedish forestry and its benefits to both the northernmost regions of Sweden and to the Swedish economy as a whole (SCA, 20251a). Forestry is closely linked with job opportunities, not only directly but also indirectly within fields such as technology and transportation, with tax revenues to local municipalities funding welfare services such as healthcare, schools and social care. On the 16th of April 2026 incumbent Swedish government announced that they are reviewing the existing Swedish forest policy from 1993. The purpose of the forest reform is to enhance ownership for Swedish forest owners, clarify rules and it advocates a competitive and active forest industry as well as sustainable growth, with regards to European Union (EU) legislation (Regeringskansliet, 2026).

In recent years, debates have sparked between stakeholders in the Swedish forest industry and criticism have been raised stemming from actors such as WWF and Greenpeace on how forestry ought to be conducted and whether the industry and governing bodies are adapting enough to environmental legislations stemming from the EU (Greenpeace, 2024). This thesis will specifically focus on the Nature Restoration Regulation that was adopted by the EU in June 2024, as part of its Biodiversity Strategy and the European Green Deal. The overarching ambition for the new regulation is to improve and restore at least 20 % of the EU’s land and sea areas by 2030, accompanied by the goal of restoring all EU’s degraded areas completely by 2050, and all member states are to come in with a national plan on how to restore their respective areas by September 2026 (European Commission 1b, n.d; Skogsstyrelsen, 20261a).

By using theoretical frameworks such as multilevel governance, the advocacy coalition framework, and global commons literature, this thesis will revolve around the dichotomy between industrial development and environmental preservation. The research aims to gain a deeper understanding of how member states’ economic reliance on their respective industries—which will be illustrated by Northern Sweden and its forest industry—is impacting their ability to adhere to environmental policies and legislation from the EU. Forests, with their carbon storing and climate change mitigating properties, will in this thesis be viewed as a global common. The assumption—or hypothesis—of the study is that since the forest industry contributes to Swedish welfare, through jobs and taxes, it creates a dilemma when having to adjust and adhere to the EU’s environmental policies and legislation.

1.2 Research Question

How do the different coalitions of the Swedish forestry sector shape the implementation of EU environmental legislation, such as the Nature Restoration Regulation?

1.3 Background

As the European Green Deal, henceforth the EGD, came into full effect in 2019 with ambitious aims of making the EU the first climate neutral region in the world by 2050, new rules and regulations started to develop, some as initiatives to keep the Just Transition on track (European Commission 1a, n.d). Defined by the United Nations (UN), a *Just Transition* refers to a transition towards low-carbon societies that are both ecologically, economically and socially sustainable (United Nations, 2023). The concept was developed to remind countries that all may not have the same prerequisites when it comes to tackling climate issues and creating climate mitigation strategies and also to encourage countries to come up with ways to promote transnational cooperation between developing and developed countries. The slogan is to "leave no one behind", which is a statement that is central in the EGD as well.

The Just Transition is integral in the EGD, where there is an awareness displayed that the policies set out to reach the goal of a climate neutral region by 2050 may have an economic impact on European households and their everyday life (European Commission, 2024). In general, the EGD, has both been praised and criticized for its level of engagement with the social and economic impact of its environmental policies. To achieve the ambitious goals of the EGD, policies and strategies have been developed such as the EU's Strategy for Biodiversity. It is within the frames of this strategy the Nature Restoration Regulation, henceforth the NRR, is developed.

The NRR was adopted in 2024 and its main goals are to improve and restore areas such as wetlands, rivers, grasslands, marine ecosystems and forests in order to increase levels of biodiversity and protect ecosystem services as well as build up resilience toward climate change and food security (European Commission 1b, n.d). It is built on the principle of non-deterioration (Naturvårdsverket, 20251b). One of the key arguments behind the NRR is that 80 percent of Europe's nature habitats are in a poor condition. There is therefore a need to put in an effort towards restoration, and also to utilize as well as capture properties of the nature

that can be useful for societies, such as carbon sinks from forests, turf fields and wetlands.¹ In addition, it has in March 2026 been reported that Sweden is not reaching its own environmental goals, at least not when it comes to the forests and the goal Thriving Forests (Skogsstyrelsen, 2026b).

The regulation includes goals, purposes of each goal, and instructions on how progress should be reported. It does not, however, include detailed strategies for how member states are meant to set up their own individual strategies. All member states have therefore been tasked with setting up an individual national plan that has to be submitted to the European Commission by September 2026 (Naturvårdsverket, 2026). The regulation aims to provide EU member states with a common purpose—what goals to reach and what to report—whilst at the same time not specifying details on how to reach them. This goes in hand with the EU's subsidiarity principle (Bjärstig & Eckerberg, 2025:81).² The total deadline for creating the national plan has been two years and leading the work in Sweden is Naturvårdsverket, together with Skogsstyrelsen, Havs- och Vattenmyndigheten, Jordbruksverket, and Boverket. All member states also had to pick a year of reference to compare with when determining the status of restoration, with Sweden's incumbent government choosing the year of 1995.

The current Swedish suggestion, the year Sweden entered the EU, has been contested by several environmental organizations as this referral year would likely not result in the restoration that the NRR is opting for (Naturvårdsverket, 2026). The direction of the central environmental governance has changed in Sweden since the change of government in 2022, from a social democratic rule to a more conservative rule, the Tidö government. One of the actions that were taken by the newly elected government was to abolish the Ministry of the Environment in 2022 and instead create a Ministry of Climate and Enterprise.

When it comes to adopting the NRR to the Swedish forest industry, it is Skogsstyrelsen, the Swedish Forest Agency, that is the responsible agency. Around 70 % of Sweden's land area is covered by forests and almost half of the forests are situated in the four northernmost counties, Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Jämtland and Västernorrland (Naturvårdsverket, 2025a). Sweden has the largest forest area in the EU and what sets Sweden apart from the rest of Europe is the division of ownership when it comes to the forests (Naturvårdsverket, 2025a;

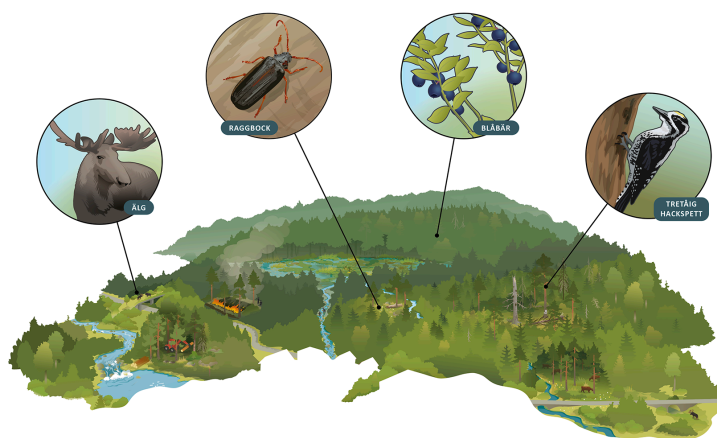
¹ Carbon sinks absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and stores it. Forests are carbon sinks that also convert the carbon dioxide into carbon and utilizes it to grow (Swedish Forest Industries, 2025a).

² The subsidiarity principle restricts direct EU intervention in member state affairs unless deemed necessary (European Parliament, 2025).

Forest Europe, 2026). In total, 48 % of Sweden's forests are owned by private owners, 25 % is owned by private corporations and 13 % are state-owned (Swedish Forest Industries, 20251b). The numbers put the cultural significance of Swedish forests into perspective, where 3 % of all Swedes are forest owners. Forests are also commonly passed down over generations and for many they are viewed as part of a lifestyle with activities such as hunting.

For all Swedes forest lands are under the law of Allemansrätten, which can roughly be translated to "The Right to Public Access" (Naturvårdsverket, n.d). It is a unique law stating that people, although they are not owners of a forest, are still allowed to venture into the forests and enjoy them. As long as they are careful and are respectful, people are as an example allowed to pick as many wild blueberries—Sweden's most common plant— as they like. This law applies to all of Sweden's 290 municipalities and its 21 regions. Another legal act that is important to bring up is the municipal equalization system, which in short means that there is central governance making sure that all regions and municipalities should have equal public access to welfare services such as healthcare and education (Ohlsson, 2025).

Furthermore, heading back to forests briefly before diving into the literature review, it is also important to note that Sweden is the fourth largest exporter of pulp, paper, board and sawn softwood in the world (KSLA 2024, p. 12). The cultural significance of forests in Sweden should not only be tied to industry, there is high recreational and traditional value as well. In parts of Northern Sweden the indigenous Sámi people use forests as part of their reindeer husbandry (Kirunalapland, n.d). People from southern parts of Sweden and from different parts of Europe travel up north to go hiking. There are many examples.



2. Review of Literature

This chapter will provide an overview of what other researchers have found in relation to the issue of EU environmental and forestry politics, the green growth region of Northern Sweden and related forestry governance. The overview of literature has been chosen to provide a foundational baseline for this study and its research question:

How do the different coalitions of the Swedish forestry sector shape the implementation of EU environmental legislation, such as the Nature Restoration Regulation?

2.1 Environmental Governance in the EU

2.1.1 The EU's Environmental Politics

The process of Europeanization includes not only setting standards through legal frameworks and regulations,³ but also through creating informal norms, setting standards, providing new insights for national policymakers and inspiring cooperation between states (Judeu and Urziceanu, 2025, p. 379). Policies that the EU introduces generally require adaptation at the national level. This is depending on a country's institutional capacity and political priorities. All member states face unique ordeals. EU environmental policies such as regulations has been shown to increase the requirement for documentation and administration (Björstig and Eckergren, 2025, p. 97; Gordeeva, Wolfslehner and Weber 2025, p. 2). Businesses, as in this case forest owners, need report on potential progress and setbacks to related government agencies so that they in the next lead can get an overview and compile reports to be sent to the EU (Björstig and Eckergren, 2025, p. 97).

Developments such as the EGD have further resulted in an increased need for integration between different jurisdictions and administrative levels, from the European Commission, trickling down towards national, regional and municipal levels (Judeu and Urziceanu, 2025, p. 380). Working toward common goals across Europe within certain policy areas has proven to create continuity and cohesiveness across different member states in the quality of results. Therese Björstig and Katarina Eckergren from Umeå university gives the example of the EU's

³ Europeanization can be explained as the process where the EU's norms, rules and practices influence the policies, institutions and administrative structures of its member states (Judeu and Urziceanu, 2025:380).

Water Framework Directive of an environmental framework that have worked well and achieved important milestones in transboundary water governance (2025, p. 82).

The direction of EU's environmental policies were firstly discussed in 1972 and then included as a chapter in the European Single Act from 1987, lifting three important points: to preserve the environment, to protect the health of humans and to use natural resources rationally (Bjärstig and Eckerberg, 2025, p. 81; Pollex and Lenschow, 2025, p. 2198). Bjärstig and Eckerberg write that the EU's environmental policy focus has gone from a sole environmental focus, towards a more inclusive umbrella, including issues of economy and socio-cultural development as well (2025, p. 81). Based on a similar argument when it comes to forests, scholars—Helena Pülzl and Helga Elomina—call the EU forest policy fragmented. They further claim that forests are framed in different ways depending on what actor it is and how they tend to use forests. This essentially impacts the overall ability to make a coherent forest framework (Pülzl and Elomina, 2021, p. 9).

The EGD focuses on different aspects of sustainability to promote a green transition and green growth while aiming to produce cross-sectoral policies that incorporate multiple aspects and levels of sustainable development in the same pillars of implementation (Bjärstig and Eckerberg, 2025, p. 81; Gordeeva et al., 2025, p. 15). However, Evgenia Gordeeva, and her co-authors Bernhard Wolfslehner and Norbert Weber point out that attempts to merge several goals into one policy instrument may also result in contradictions between policy sectors (Gordeeva et al., 2025, p. 16). The authors finds that some policies could even be harmful to each other, and exemplifies the EU's biofuel policy and the objectives that come with its Biodiversity Strategy (Gordeeva et al., 2025, p. 16).

This trend is not exclusive to the EU and its Green Deal, Michelle M. L. Lim and her co-authors Peter Sogaard Jørgensen and Carina A Wyborn also point out a similar trend in the UN global framework, the Sustainable Development Goals, henceforth the SDGs. Their article specifically focuses on how particular SDGs, described as "an action-oriented road map," may coincide with the realization of other SDGs (Lim et al., 2018, p. 1). To facilitate their analysis they use the method of network analysis. Among the findings was that the SDGs is a system of targets where some goals are more integrated than others. That goals are integrated means that some of the goals sometimes rely on the realization of other goals to be achieved and the authors found that it was also quite common for trade-offs between goals having to be made (Lim et al., 2018, p. 7-9). This can be exemplified as the trade-off sometimes needing to be made between prioritizing economic growth as an initiative to

improve human development versus creating long-term environmental stability which may leave people with less money.

Another finding was that it is specifically important for the realization of such broad directives and goals to have sufficient tools for policy implementation, involving multiple administrative levels of political organization (Lim et al., 2018, p. 10). The governance structures and inspirational leaders (Pollex and Lenschow, 2024, p. 2217) need to be there to incentivize actors in different sectors and institutions to implement the necessary policies to reach the set out goals, even if these actions require new work outside their ordinary work structures.

2.1.2 Social Impacts of Environmental Policies

Economic viability can be viewed as a prerequisite for social benefits and thereby human health, capabilities and societal satisfaction (Stiglitz and Rosengard, 2015, p. 67).⁴ In public economics welfare is often put next to the Pareto efficiency theorem, which in its foundation entails that no one can be made better off without making someone else worse off. A welfare state can be described as a system where the government is responsible for ensuring economic and social well-being among its citizens. In this thesis the Swedish welfare state will be conceptualized as a social-democratic welfare state, as described in Gøsta Esping-Andersen's typology of welfare regimes from 1990.

Focusing on the social impacts of climate mitigation policies, Sanna Markkanen and Annela Anger-Kravi discuss how climate mitigation policies can influence "disparities for well-being" and inequality (2019, p. 828). Inequality is in the article defined as "the unequal rewards or access to opportunities for different individuals between groups within society" (Markkanen and Anger-Kravi, 2019, p. 828).

The authors also bring up the fact that people within the lower-incomes and minority households are often less politically active and less involved in political decision-making processes (Markkanen and Anger-Kravi, 2019, p. 829). The economic equality aspect of their study, is specifically interesting for this thesis. The authors found that there tended to be more positive outcomes for economic equality and poor households when policies tended to alleviate expenditures and improve opportunities for economic participation (Markkanen and Anger-Kravi, 2019, p. 834). The authors picks out examples of this phenomenon from their

⁴ Capabilities is here understood as Amartya Sen's Capability Approach. The approach focuses on people's capabilities to live their lives as they wish and not only from basic needs (Kuklys, 2005).

extensive review of literature, such as improving public transport connectivity, and strategically locating new green industries in areas with limited job opportunities. Similar examples are given by Lars Westin (Westin, 2023, p. 101).

New green policies may also backfire, where the green transition at times result in job losses due to automatization practices or outsourcing mechanisms (Markkanen and Anger-Kravi, 2019, 835). Another example given is the UN-backed REDD++ programs—Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation—designed to help developing countries, which essentially at times risked exacerbating the incomes of local communities. Markkanen and Anger-Kravi eventually found that it is important to enable local communities and workforces in the implementation and to also recognize and find ways to ensure equitable distribution of potential benefits (2019, p. 837).

2.1.3 The New Forest Strategy 2030

In their study from 2025, Gordeeva, Wolfslehner and Weber compare forest-related and forest-focused legal acts over the course of three different EU forest strategies, in 1998, 2013 and 2021. Forest-focused legal acts are explained as addressing forest and the management of forests, often with motivations from the forest sector, and forest-related policies also address forest management and forests, but from a perspective of achieving policy goals stemming from domains such as nature conservation and climate policy (Gordeeva, Wolfslehner and Weber, 2025, p. 1). So far this decade, the authors found that the number of **forest-related policies** stemming from the EU has grown, as well as their scope and overall reach (Gordeeva, Wolfslehner and Weber, 2025, p. 2).

This trend, seen in the most recent EU Forest Strategy from 2021 also called the New Forest Strategy 2030, shows that there has been a shift from previous more loosely sets of directives and goals, toward more binding frameworks in forms of regulations and clearer guidelines on implementation (Gordeeva, Wolfslehner and Weber, 2025, p. 2). With the New Forest strategy, 2030 other strategies such as the Biodiversity Strategy and the Bioeconomy Strategy came in to existence as well, and later the Nature Restoration Regulation that came in a centrally focused, legally-binding form as a regulation (Gordeeva, Wolfslehner and Weber, 2025, p. 2).

This is a slight change from the EGD, which has been criticized for lacking sufficient supportive instruments and legal as well as institutional foundations for the implementation of its strategies (Domorenok and Gatti, 2026, p. 3). The supportive instruments could here be

exemplified as equal ways depending on member state on how to do measurements and economic prerequisites to keep them up consistently. The authors, Ekaterina Domorenok and Franco Gatti, discuss the fact that it is important that there is cohesiveness among member states, a common understanding why certain policies ought to be implemented and to share the same policy paradigm (2026, p. 10-11). Looking at the landscape of member states and their different multiple governance levels, it is also important to remember that states often consist of regions and municipalities (Söderbaum, 2019, p. 5).

Domorenok and Gatti further discuss how paradigms and ideas relate to policy change, and how the EU's discourse on sustainability and the environment has changed over time. The EGD as an example, was initially presented as a new growth strategy by the European Commission, with people viewed more as consumers and jobholders rather than citizens with diverse social needs, and it has been accused of not addressing social issues in an adequate way or the potential for addressing climate change without changing social values (Domorenok and Gatti, 2026, p. 3).

2.2 Green Growth in Sweden's Northernmost Region

Fredrik Söderbaum nuances the conventional idea on regions, and introduces the concept of regionalism which he defines as representing "the body of ideas, values, and policies that are aimed at creating a region" (Söderbaum, 2019, p. 26). The region in focus of this thesis: **Northern Sweden**, as described by Lars Westin, offers several advantages: there are vast, spacious lands for development of new industrial establishments. There are at the same time already plenty of established green energy structures such as wind and hydroelectric power as well as **forests**, that feed into the narrative of green industrial development (Westin, 2023, p. 96). Northern Sweden is by Westin defined by the four northernmost counties, Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Jämtland and Västernorrland. This definition will also be adopted throughout this thesis.

The notion of a *green location* for industrial development fits well into the contemporary trends of sustainability, or as Westin calls it, "the overall global sustainability mega trend" (Westin, 2023, p. 96). Since world leaders came together for collective action and the Montreal Protocol in 1987 to reduce the risk of depleting the ozone layer (UNEP, n.d), other initiatives have been created. These initiatives include the Millennium Development Goals, that later in 2015 was replaced by the SDG framework consisting of 17 goals, which in turn inspired the 2019 EGD.

The concept of a "just transition" that is widely used in the sustainability debate (Markkanen and Anger-Kraavi, 2019, p. 828; Domorenok and Gatti, 2026, p. 3), where ecological and social goals are meant to be balanced, can be argued to relate to scholar Max Koch description of ecological ceilings and social floors (Koch, 2015, p. 1671). The social floors refers to the minimum level of needs satisfaction with access to public services, work and housing, and then there are the ecological ceilings, described as the limits of sustainable resource use.

Looking at the green industry narrative in the case of Northern Sweden, Westin draws similar parallels to the social opportunities created in the region by its extensive variety of resources which in the early nineteenth century inspired many Swedes to move up north for job opportunities (Westin, 2023, p. 104). With the contemporary trend of green growth in Northern Sweden, Westin describes that the influx of green development also puts more pressure on municipalities for delivering housing and also to inspire people to stay, for the long-term welfare of the region (Westin, 2023, p. 101). He argues that it is not only about creating green industries that can help with the green transition, it is also important to see that there is a connection to welfare with people staying and paying taxes to the municipalities.

Moreover, after trends of outsourcing certain industries to other countries, the region faced a lasting stagnation without migration of young people and a slowed down welfare development (Westin, 2023, p. 111). After years of stagnation, Westin still describes the region as a stable basis for the Swedish economy and as an ideal location for green industries. It is still, however, common with head offices of industrial actors in more southern parts of Sweden and as technology improves there is an increased risk for knowledge drain and fly-in, fly-out solutions, where educated people tend to move away to work elsewhere or people from head offices that only come up north to work occasionally. This would not be beneficial for tax income to the local municipalities and potentially have an impact on the region's political outreach (Westin, 2023, p. 113).

Alexander Paulsson, Max Koch, Mine Islar and Riya Raphael further make a connection between democratic values, education and work (2025:115-116). They argue that work produces prerequisites for basic needs, education produces prerequisites to be an informed member of society and where democratic practices are fundamental for taking collective societal action. If people working with industries in the region tend to live outside it, it may have implications for who the voice of the region should belong to on the political arena (Westin, 2023, p. 109). Democratic backsliding is mentioned in Jesper Svensson, Ida Wallin

and Nils Droste's report "Makten över skogen",⁵ published in 2026, as an increased risk from having the trade or business sector being too present in politics (Svensson, Wallin and Droste 2026, p. 60). The authors point to the importance of transparency among government agencies and also among top government employees as findings show that several of these also had connections with certain Public Affairs enterprises, which may in some instances influence politics impacting the governance of Swedish forestry. That aspect will not however be in focus in this thesis.

2.3 Commercial-Environmental Interests in the Swedish Forestry Sector

Bjärstig and Eckerberg describe the environment as a difficult area to govern as nature and its land areas often stretches across several administrative regions and it is therefore an issue that needs to be governed from multiple levels, from municipal and regional levels to supranational levels such as EU (2025, p. 79). Swedish environmental governance has traditionally been relatively centralized with Naturvårdsverket, henceforth the Swedish Nature Agency, as supervisory authority, but central governance has been leaning increasingly toward decentralization by the shutdown of the environmental government department and the increased reliance on local authorities and other government agencies such as Skogsstyrelsen, the Swedish Forest agency (Bjärstig and Eckerberg, 2025, p. 84-87).

The authors also write about the phenomenon where there are many different voices and actors in the Swedish environmental sector, such as WWF and Naturskyddsföreningen—The Nature Protection Agency—that function as lobbyists to the EU (Bjärstig and Eckergren, 2025, p. 92). Lobbyism can be understood as attempts to influence certain policy processes and it can be a way to influence the status quo (Svensson, Wallin and Droste, 2026, p. 19). Svensson and his co-authors discovered in their article that many environmental organizations had an early presence in Brussels, a center for EU policy-making, and that it is easier to coordinate larger mobilizations toward the same goals in such organizations if compared others such as corporations or national governments, actors that may have other opinions on the same topic (2026, p. 36).

Sweden's forests have been used in different ways and been situated in different paradigms of knowledge since historical times (Zhang, Mårald and Bjärstig, 2022, p. 430). It has gone

⁵ Democratic backsliding can also be called autocratization, and it can be explained as a systematic weakening of government norms and institutions. It is a trend that has been reported in a few western democracies, the US included (Göteborgs universitet, 2026).

from traditional, family-oriented multi-use household production, towards a dominance in production-oriented forestry that really took hold during the 1970's and 1980's amidst globalization. Later came another influx of global environmental initiatives and criticism that dominated the discourse in the late 1980's (Zhang, Mårald and Bjärstig, 2022, p. 431; Gordeeva, Weber and Wolfslehner, 2025, p. 1).

Domorenok and Gatti further discuss in their article from 2026 how the mark of sustainability may impact how growth is portrayed, accepted or legitimized. Framing growth as sustainable,⁶ could lead to an increased acceptance of certain industries while lacking a mark of sustainability may sway the public opinion into believing that commercial interests are negative (Lim et al., 2018, p. 3; Elomina and Pülzl, 2021, p. 9). Along with another set of scholars Pülzl together with, Metodi Sotirov, George Winker and Jeanne-Lazya Roux, applies a cultural lens to understand how forests are seen by different actors depending on their worldviews and cultural relationship to forests (Roux et al., 2025, p. 124-126). Here they divide different groups into three: environmentalists, private forestry actors and state forestry actors. It was found that their competing views on climate change mitigation strategies, and forest use impacts the debate, which essentially complicates EU forest governance.

⁶ The sociologist Erving Goffman coined the term "framing" in 1974, and it refers to how people makes sense of reality depending on their experiences, backgrounds or previous knowledge (Goffman, 1974).

3. Theoretical Framework

This chapter contains the two theoretical frameworks that constitute the theoretical foundation of this thesis. First up is multilevel governance from a perspective of postfunctionalism, that will serve as a theoretical backdrop, and then the advocacy coalition framework that will add layers and colors to the analysis in a later chapter.

3.1 Societies Built on Multilevel Governance

3.1.1 Differentiating Government and Governance

In their article from 2014, Liesbeth Hooghe and Gary Marks wrote that the word government was not "limited to what we would recognize as states; it denoted the act of governing or ruling in general" (Hooghe and Marks, 2020, p. 821). The notion that the word *government* refers to state governing has not always been a given and evidence of this can be found in languages such as French where *gouvernement* translates to "control, direction or administration" and Latin where *gubernare* means to "pilot a ship" (Hooghe and Marks, 2020, p. 821). In today's society the word *government* is mostly associated with state governance with monopoly within a set territory, including institutions that exercise state authority, but in prehistorical settings the term was more loosely defined.

Governance on the other hand, has in modern day become a word that adheres more closely with old interpretations of the government, venturing beyond the state and including actors not involved specifically in state authority, both beyond the modern forms of government and within. The term governance has been widely used in contexts of international organizations, gathering people for global common causes such as ocean governance or forest governance (Hooghe and Marks, 2020, p. 822; Helmholtz, 2025). The meaning of governance has become more about inspiring and governing people to mobilize for specific purposes. The SDGs is an example of a framework set out with ambitious goals to mobilize people in desired directions.

3.1.2 Governing Global Commons

In global commons literature, the American professor Garrett Hardin, sometimes described as a pioneer in the field of **global environmental governance**, argued that the world needs to be viewed as finite rather than infinite (Hardin, 1968, p. 1243). In his thesis, the Tragedy of the Commons, Hardin writes about overpopulation and humans as self-interested beings, locked

in a capitalistic system where they need to maximize their utility,⁷ and thereby stimulate continuous growth despite limitations on resources and natural constraints (Hardin, 1968, p. 1244). The example he paints is the one of herdsmen having access to the same pasture for grazing their animals. As the herdsmen are described as self-interested by nature, they are all forced to utilize the pasture as much as they can until it eventually runs out of grass, eventually leaving the animals with no food and the herdsmen with nothing to feed them with.

Economist Elinor Ostrom questions the reality of the Tragedy of the Commons and throughout her career she also researched and contributed to commons literature and found evidence that it is not always central governing that is the solution to mitigating exploitation and effects from overuse, as suggested by Hardin (Ostrom, 2008, p. 2; Hardin, 1968, p. 1245). Instead she found that local communities working together voluntarily in accordance with their traditional ways and knowledge, the common pools of resources tended to remain stable. Her research shows evidence that it is possible for local communities to self-govern common pools of resources, such as forests, often by possessing homogenous skills and having similar interests in reaping continuously stable and positive benefits from the resource (Ostrom, 2008, p. 3).

3.1.3 Governance on Multiple Levels

Ostrom once said "national governments are too small to govern the global commons and too big to handle smaller scale problems" (Hooghe and Marks, 2020, p. 822). One could describe the EU as such an institution that exercises governance over a set of states and institutions, including commons such as oceans but also forests. For the EU, that is neither a state nor does it have monopoly of authority in a set territory, although the EU law take precedence over the national law of EU member states, *governance* is a central word of its operations and it also holds some explanatory power of how policies are meant to steer its respective members in a common direction. **Multilevel governance** can be explained as governance between different jurisdictional levels in a vertical hierarchy from local to regional, national and supranational. The concept aims to capture the complexity of governance in multilevel settings that are beyond the nation state and it may incentivize both subnational or non-state actors to participate and seek involvement in the policy-making around specific interest areas—

⁷ Utilitarianism is an ethical theory stating that the most moral action is seeking to maximize utility, being well-being and happiness, whilst minimizing the amount of pain or harm ((Lang, 2015, p. 55).

fostering strong foundations and communities in certain fields—but it might also come with challenges (Benz, Broschek, and Lederer, 2021, p. 1; Hooghe and Marks, 2020, p. 822-823).⁸

Martino Maggetti and Philipp Trein describe multilevel governance, henceforth MLG, as a way of creating a problem-solving capacity, where one entity, such as a state, is not alone in solving bigger issues but that there are other parts included as well (Maggetti and Trein, 2019, p. 356). The concept includes not only state actors and supranational institutions, but also subnational actors such as regions or provinces as well as private, non-state actors such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and corporations. MLG thus allows the researcher to capture the different structural dynamics and the complexity that comes with governing across multiple jurisdictional scales and functional boundaries (Benz, Broschek, and Lederer, 2021, p. 2).

In different words: at times governing bodies delegate certain processes to non-state actors that have more expertise in certain areas or they take certain information into account provided by non-state actors such as lobbyists. The governing process could also take place in different forms of government, from the state-level to local authorities. In relation to MLG, Arthur Benz, Jörg Broschek and Markus Lederer write about a related concept called authority migration, which can be explained as when authority moves in different directions from the central national state (2021, p. 3). These directions can be both sideways, toward corporations and NGOs, upwards, toward supranational institutions and also downwards, towards local authorities.

3.1.4 Roots and Issues of Multilevel Governance

The framework of MLG was initially introduced by Liesbeth Hooghe and Gary Marks as a model to deepen the understanding of European integration, specifically when it came to the rise and conduct of regional actors, as well as an alternative to an intergovernmental approach (Benz, Broschek, and Lederer, 2021, p. 5; Casula, 2021, p. 1050; Hooghe and Marks, 2003, p. 233).⁹ For the EU as a region on a global scale, it has specific internal parts that need governing, specifically when it comes to comparative advantages, creating stability and maintaining a certain global reputation. Although the EU does possess some level of authority and can come in with big-picture perspectives, it also shares the authority with its member

⁸ The nation-state can be explained as a homogenous or unified group that resides within a set territory, governed by a sovereign state.

states who also possess expertise on their own territories (Hooghe and Marks, 2020, p. 821; Hooghe and Marks, 2020, p. 822).

Hooghe and Marks further divided the MLG concept into two different types of governance (Hooghe and Marks, 2003, p. 236-237). Type I is more focused on vertical structures of government, where there is no overlap in terms of jurisdiction and there is a clear power division between them: such as municipalities and then their respective national authorities. Type II on the other hand is more than a territorial hierarchy, and is often described as a network of numerous specialized, task-specific authorities that are more prone to change in terms of shifting policy demands and their work often tend to overlap.

	Type I	Type II
Structure	Layered	Network
Characteristics	No overlap, general-purpose, durable and stable, providing a range of jurisdictional services	Overlap, specific purpose, "patch work of authority", dynamic changes
Example	Federal systems in a state, social services, municipality	A state agency for a specific purpose,

Figure 1: *Two types of governance.*

In his article from 2021, Mattias Casula looks more specifically at how the complexity of joint action between different actors across multiple levels may impact the efficiency of policy implementation and ultimately the success of policy implementation. It is found in his research that the effectiveness of decentralized policy management, which is often indicated by MLG type II, can at times be affected by conflicting policy traditions and different institutional architectures (Casula, 2021, p. 1066). The article's findings further suggest that supervision from a higher form of government may be needed to monitor the different actors, such as politicians, technical actors, vertical and jurisdictional actors, to ensure effective implementation and to avoid so-called implementation gaps (Casula, 2021, p. 1049).

Apart from Hooghe and Marks, Casula also relied on the remarks from Simona Piattoni who suggests that "the concept of MLG should not only be a mere descriptor of existing governance structures, but a tool to help analyze the implications of these structures in

different countries” (Casula, 2021, p. 1050). In his article, Casula moves to analyze the implications of having multiple governing structures working toward one single policy goal by focusing on locating implementation gaps of specific policies. Implementation gaps are defined as a case where there is a ”non-compliance with intended policy” (Casula, 2021, p. 1052). As a method to look at the efficiency of a certain policy implementation in a hierarchical structure, Casula looked at the possible implementation gap as a dependent variable and then potential, and particular context factors as the independent variable.

Casula describes that Piattoni moves away from the traditional sense of MLG, once created by Gary Marks and Liesbet Hooghe, and instead seeks to use the concept as an analytical tool to look at accountability issues in MLG systems as well as raise concerns about democracy and equal access to networks in charge. Her emphasis on the notion of relational power—asking questions related to power constructions within MLG settings—shows that MLG can be used, as more than a mere descriptor of a multilevel setting. This notion leads us in this thesis to the next theoretical point of view which is the main analytical tool of this thesis.

3.2 Advocacy Coalition Framework

3.2.1 Core Tenets of the Advocacy Coalition Framework

Advocacy Coalition Framework was originally developed in the 1980's to improve the understanding of how policy processes play out over time, a decade or more, by Hank Jenkins-Smith and Paul Sabatier (Weible and Jenkins-Smith, 2025, p. 2). The aim was to recognize policy processes as non-linear rather than linear, and to identify drivers of policy processes and influences from different levels. Sabatier had an interest in policy implementation as well as the bridge between top-down and bottom-up approaches: from more formal institutions and legislations to the roles of street-level bureaucrats, NGOs and other actors. It is with this connection the Advocacy Coalition Framework, henceforth ACF, also fits with the umbrella framework of MLG that focuses on governance across different jurisdictional and administrative levels.

In ACF, the world is depicted as having a **subsystem** with intense competitions (Weible and Jenkins-Smith, 2025, p. 16). To identify and explain a subsystem interaction it is important to find out what specific policy is to be looked at, and then identify subsystems from there. The concept recognizes the complexity of the institutional arena where policy processes take place and that there are a range of actors contributing to this (Weible and

Jenkins-Smith, 2025, p. 7). Sub-communities can further be explained as actors seeking to regularly influence certain policies tied to specific problem areas within a defined geographic region (Weible and Jenkins-Smith, 2025, p. 6).

The ACF looks at the **Policy Subsystem** as its primary unit of analysis, which can be explained as the mix or coalitions of actors that drive policy change and influences around a specific policy stream,¹⁰ over a longer period of time: often a decade or more (Weible and Jenkins-Smith, 2025, p. 7). The assumption of ACF is that actors strategically coordinate themselves with allies that have similar belief systems, with aims to fairly distribute resources and efforts, when in a confrontational context and thereby forming advocacy coalitions. The coalitions compete with each other and seek to essentially gather support from the general public and related authorities. If it is possible, coalitions seek to entirely make changes of the rules and procedures of the subsystem and have an impact on its outcomes. Policy losses and policy wins function both as motivators as well as momentums for the coalitions to keep going (Weible and Jenkins-Smith, 2025, p. 16). Often used in comparative studies, one of the more successful studies was an analysis of collating structures in the gas and oil development across seven Western European and North American countries (Weible and Jenkins-Smith, 2025, p. 4).

In this thesis the ACF will be used as a way to understand the different arguments and groups when it comes to the Swedish forest and the development of the Swedish national plan for NRR. The analysis will identify different coalitions in accordance with the ACF, and to discuss their potential effect on each other as well as their impact on how the NRR has been implemented.

Furthermore, in ACF, policies are further described as parts of subsystems and that they reflect the beliefs of one or more coalitions. In their edition from 2025, Christopher Weible and Hank Jenkins-Smith describe it as "Rather than viewing public policies solely as political maneuvering among coalitions, policies represent aspects of competing 'casual theories' mobilized to achieve normative ends" (Weible and Jenkins-Smith, 2025, p. 10). Policies can therefore be interpreted as results from coalition efforts advocating in favor of their beliefs and values, and not only as government actions.

¹⁰ John Kingdon describes the policy stream, which is part of his multiple streams theory, as a "primeval soup" of ideas, with proposals that has been developed within different policy communities (Kingdon, 2014:113-117).

3.2.2 *Employing ACF*

Policy change within ACF can be explained as a long process driven by competing coalitions. Weible and Jenkins-Smith further describe the ACF focus on policy change as having a risk of the "shiny object syndrome". When a researcher chooses a specific policy change to look at, it poses the risk of overlooking other policies that are not as obvious or visible (Weible and Jenkins-Smith, 2025, p. 100). Picking what policy to research may therefore be said to pose further risks of bias and methodological differences within ACF can cause inconsistencies.

This research has worked with ACF in four steps along with complementary concepts from John Kingdon. The first step has been to define a subsystem with a specific policy area (Swedish forestry), locate the most prominent actors involved, and then what types of legislations there are and what venues for facilitating these. The second step has been to identify what actors have similar beliefs and to divide them in coalitions. This has been done by reading literature written by other scholars, and by analyzing the four chosen reports and the three interviews conducted as part of the primary dataset of this thesis. In the third step, the study employed Kingdon's conception of **policy entrepreneurs**, that can be described as actors that take the lead in enacting policy change by finding ways of pushing issues to the top of the political agenda and mustering attention towards specific problems (Kingdon, 2014, p. 113). This was done while analyzing the primary material, by looking at what actors stands out as pushing certain issues to the political agenda.

The final step has been to identify particular external events that may have created **policy windows**, a concept which Kingdon defines as "an opportunity for advocates of proposals to push their pet solutions, or to push attention to their special problems" (2014, p. 165). When a policy window opens, the policy entrepreneur acts and puts their preferred policy solution forward. Kingdon describes the phenomenon as it becomes more about attaching a problem to a desired solution, rather than a solution to a problem (Kingdon, 2014, p. 165-166, 181).

3.3 Conceptual Framework

As discussed above, to analyze the material a theoretical framework has been designed to both cover aspects of the different levels of governance and voices in the different subsystems starting with MLG. To localize the coalitions ACF and Kingdon's concepts policy entrepreneur and policy window will be used. In the theoretical discussion and analysis concepts such as Söderbaum's conceptualization of regions and the idea of a just transition, will be problematized and discussed along with the eco-social implications of the NRR.

4. Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology of this thesis. First there will be an operationalization of the case study approach of this thesis, following an outline of the chosen material, ethical considerations and the method of qualitative content analysis. Finally there will be a section on limitations, briefly discussing the chosen methods and materials.

4.1 The Case Study and the Approach

This thesis draws inspiration from John Gerring's definition of a case study which he describes as "*an intensive study of a single unit with an aim to generalize across a larger set of units*". Gerring further describes the case study method as a way of defining cases, rather than a way to analyze them (2004, p. 341-342). It is therefore important to have an analytical framework consisting of theory and concepts defined by scholars in previous literature, to accompany the case study methodology. A unit is explained as "a spatially bounded phenomenon"—that can be exemplified as a nation-state, revolution, or a political party—and a unit being observed over either one single point in time or during a limited period of time. In this thesis the unit can be understood as the recent forestry debate in Sweden with focus on the year of 2025 amidst the creation of the national plan for the NRR.

Furthermore, this study also draws inspiration from Bernt Flyberg where he uses the Merriam-Webster's dictionary that defines a case study as an "*intensive analysis of an individual unit (as a person or a community) stressing developmental factors in relation to environment*" (2011, p. 301). The individual unit is here understood as a "functioning specific" or "a bounding system", meaning that the boundaries of the case need to be defined along with how it shall be studied.

According to Flyberg it is also important to recognize that describing case studies insinuates that results will likely produce more in-depth, detailed knowledge and insights, and that it is also important to recognize the setting around the case and what developments there may have been over time (2011, p. 301, 303). When it comes to the case of this thesis, the unit in focus, the debate of 2025, can further be described as the tensions between the EU's desires on nature restoration and Swedish commercial forestry interests, specifically in Northern Sweden. The time period of progressions building up to the current debate can be said to have started in 1995, the year of Sweden's entrance to the EU, and from 1993, the year of Sweden's first forest strategy that focused both on production goals and environmental goals (Skogsstyrelsen, 2024, p. 99-101). The level of analysis will be on the national level, although

the study uses MLG as a backdrop framework to capture the complexity of a policy system that is situated across multiple levels and the ACF will be employed as an analytical tool.

As previously mentioned, the assumption or *hypothesis* of the study is that since the forest industry contributes to Swedish welfare, through jobs and taxes, it creates a dilemma when having to adjust and adhere to EU's environmental policies and legislations. The research question that has guided the study is:

How do the different coalitions of the Swedish forestry sector shape the implementation of EU environmental legislation, such as the Nature Restoration Regulation?

Furthermore, this case study can be described as a study of a critical case, which is explained by Flyberg as a type of case that has a "*strategic importance in relation to the general problem*" (Flyberg, 2011, p. 307). The debate on Swedish forestry can be interpreted as a timely and a current representation of how EU legislation may create domestic coalitions. In turn, these coalitions may stir up varying aspects of the debate concerning commercial interests and environmental interests, which may in the next lead influence the adaptability of actors to the new legislations and thereby the implementation of the legislations.

4.2 Secondary Data

This study is based upon an extensive review of literature focusing on the region of Northern Sweden, forestry, environmental policy-making in the EU and global governance of commons. The literature review was mainly found on search engines such as Google Scholar, but also at Lund University's library search engine using keywords such as EU, environment, forests, policy, and welfare. It was important to make sure the literature did not solely come from climate-themed or forestry-themed journals, but also journals relating to the topic of governing on multiple levels and the EU, such as the Journal of European Public Policy and the Journal of European Policy Analysis. This initiative was taken to give the literature review an influx of varying perspectives, both from a public administrative point of view, an EU perspective whilst including environmental and social perspectives as well.

The literature was further divided into three themes, and analyzed to locate different debates that were relevant to the topic and the research question, as well as finding useful concepts. The purpose of the first theme, *Environmental Governance in the EU*, was to add context to the multilevel setting and to find points of interest in the more general debate of the

EU's environmental governance. The second theme, *Green Growth in Sweden's Northernmost Region*, adds context to a different side of the debate—the green growth industry debate in North Sweden— and how this may influence the debate in the forestry sector. The final theme, *Commercial-Environmental Interests in the Swedish Forestry Sector*, further situates the Swedish debate around its cultural heritage of forestry, the multiple actors involved and lobbyism.

4.3 Primary Data

The primary dataset consists of different types of texts (Halperin and Heath, 2015, p. 376-378), four reports and the transcriptions of three semi-structured interviews.

4.3.1 The Four Reports

As a foundation of this primary data set there were four reports, all dated from 2025, that were chosen. It can be described as each report has been chosen due to their unique position as different actors in the Swedish forestry debate.

The first one is a report from Industriarbetsgivarna, The Swedish Association of Industrial Employers, called "**Skogsnäringens betydelse för välfärden**" which roughly translates to "The significance of the forest industry for welfare". Industriarbetsgivarna can be described as a labor organization representing companies and private owners in different Swedish basic industries such as steel, mining, pulp, paper and forestry (Industriarbetsgivarna, n.d). The report, "*Skogsnäringens betydelse för välfärden*" sheds light upon the connection between forestry and welfare, with forestry also including industries connected with forest such as paper and pulp. Welfare is in the report connected to the amount of jobs and employment that are connected to forestry as well as the importance of forestry as an export commodity.

The second report is from SCA, and it is called "**Skogsnäringens betydelse för norra Sverige**", which roughly means "The significance of forestry for Northern Sweden". SCA is one of Sweden's largest forest owners, and Europe's largest private forest owners. It is a forestry company mainly owning forests in Northern Sweden as well as in the Baltics (SCA, 20251b).

The third report is from Statens Offentliga Utredningar, Swedish Government Official Reports (SOU), "**En robust skogspolitik för aktivt skogsbruk**" and it roughly translates to "A Robust Forest Policy for Active Forestry". The report that will be included in this thesis is the first report, "En robust skogspolitik för aktivt skogsbruk Del 1", and due to the length of

the report, the pages focused on are from the report summary on pp. 27-45 as well as chapter 2 pp. 100-105 and chapter 3 pp. 325-40 and pp. 372-384. These are the chapters on the issue specifically tied to the dichotomy between conservation and industrial development (SOU, 2025, p. 100), from the year of 1993 and onwards. This report reviews the Swedish forest policy with references to the year of 1993, and analyzes how to meet modern challenges connected with increased EU regulations, efficiency demands and how to work with new environmental benchmarks.

The final report is a referral response to the SOU report by Naturskyddsföreningen, the Swedish Nature Conservation Organization, which is Sweden's largest environmental organization (Naturskyddsföreningen, n.d). The organization is also non-politically affiliated. Their referral response offers an alternate view and an evaluation of "En robust skogspolitik för aktivt skogsbruk". The response is critical toward the lack of long-term sustainability focus of the report and argues that the report instead advocates an intensified, industrial forest policy that may exacerbate the environmental issues facing the forests.

	Report 1	Report 2	Report 3	Report 4
Type of Organization	Labor-organization	Corporation	Government	Environmental organization
Organization	Industri-arbetsgivarna	SCA	SOU	Naturskyddsföreningen
Name of Report	"Skogs-näringens betydelse för välfärden"	"Skogs-näringens betydelse för norra Sverige"	"En robust skogspolitik för aktivt skogsbruk"	Referral response to: "En robust skogspolitik för aktivt skogsbruk"

Figure 2: *The four reports.*

4.3.2 The Three Interviews and Ethical Considerations

The interviews can be described as expert interviews (Halperin and Heath, 2020, p. 324), with highly knowledgeable participants on the topic of Swedish forestry. Key criteria when finding participants for the interview were that they needed to have a strong connection with the topic of forestry in Sweden—not necessarily the same educational or professional background—but it was important the candidates did have extensive experience from the field. Initial contact was made with the organizations of the participants, and I (the researcher) was later referred to candidates that had taken up an interest in the study. The method of gathering participants thereby resemble the method of snow-ball sampling (Lamont, 2015, p. 147).

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured fashion and this particular style of interviewing was chosen as it includes having a few pre-prepared questions, while allowing asking follow-up questions during the interview session (Halperin and Heath, 2020, p. 313; Aberbach and Rockman, 2002, p. 674). The questions were formulated from inspirations of the findings in the literature review. The interviews were all approximately 30 minutes long and all three participants were asked the same six questions with reservation of a few follow-up questions. Including these interviews in the primary dataset was an initiative to triangulate the data from the reports. The table below provides an indication of who the participants are. WWF is a global environmental organization and Norra Skog is one of Sweden's largest forest owner associations with focus on Northern Sweden (WWF, n.d; Norra Skog, n.d).

	Interviewee 1	Interviewee 2	Interviewee 3
Type of Organization	Environmental NGO	Forest Owner Association	-
Name of Organizaton	WWF	Norra Skog	-
Role	Senior Forest Advisor	Näringspolitisk strateg	-
Date of Interview	April 8th 2026	April 16th 2026	-

Figure 3: *The three interviews*

To ensure an ethical conduct of the interviews, the research used informed consent as its leading principle (Wilés, 2013, p. 5). Informed consent entails that all research participants should be provided with clear information about what the research will be about, as well as offering them the opportunity to think about their preferred level of anonymity ahead of the

interview. It was also important to give the participants an opportunity to autonomously evaluate benefits and risks with participating in the research and to prepare their answers (Halperin and Heath, 2020, p. 177, 335). As the forestry debate in Sweden has been high up on the political agenda during the last year, these aspects were especially important to consider in order to ensure an ethical conduct and to ensure that there was no risk of harming the participants. A part from informed consent, virtues such as sincerity and respectfulness were also central when conducting the interviews (Wiles, 2013, p. 5).

In this study, the interviewees were sent a consent form five days ahead of the scheduled interview. Via the consent form they received information about anonymity options, general information about the study, and a list of the questions. The interviews were all held online via video link and they were recorded and later transcribed (Halperin and Heath, 2020, p. 311, 318, 321). As mentioned before, due to the sensitivity of the topic and this debate in the forestry field, it was of utmost importance for the participants to give a clear response on what level of anonymity they preferred. All the participants gave their consent to record the interview, and two of the participants approved the disclosure of their names, organizations and roles. In this final report, the names were not included as an initiative to protect the privacy of the participants. To take further precautions the interview transcripts were not included in the Appendix of this thesis. Instead a summary of the findings can be found in Chapter 5.

4.4 Analyzing the Primary Data

After gathering said material, the method of a qualitative content analysis was employed to analyze the material and locate answers the research question. The analysis was also guided by the aim of the research which was to gain a deeper understanding of how member states' economic reliance on their respective industries is impacting their ability to adhere to environmental policies and legislation from the EU. A qualitative content analysis allows searching for latent content, meaning content that exists in between the lines and that may hide motives embedded in the text (Halperin and Heath, 2020, p. 376). This method was particularly chosen as it aided in uncovering the varying actors and arguments surrounding the Swedish forestry debate, ultimately revealing the different coalitions.

In conducting the qualitative content analysis followed Sandra Halperin and Oliver Heath's four steps (2020, p. 377-379). As previously mentioned, the primary data chosen consisted of three interviews and four reports. One of the reports is a SOU, another one is a referral reply

to the SOU, there is one report from SCA and one from Industriarbetsgivarna. The material was divided into themes inspired by the dichotomy between conservation-industrial development, and then categorized into categories. To each category there were also several subcategories found to how the categories were operationalized. See coding framework with the recording units below (Halperin and Heath, 2020, p. 378).

The aim with the analysis was to find main arguments and to see what each report focuses on mostly, and whether there are similarities or differences in the content, to ultimately be able to locate coalitions and to see whether the hypothesis of this thesis was correct. It was also important to ponder and find out what specific issues actors within the different coalitions tended to focus on. This was a way to operationalize the different categories, where Swedish welfare as an example, was often connected with jobs, taxes and infrastructure. Environmental governance on the other hand revolved more around wordings and expressions relating to climate mitigation, environmental legislation and sustainability issues. See figure 4 below.

Themes	Categories	Subcategories
Environmental Conservation: Environmental Interests	Environmental Governance	<i>Renewables, climate change mitigation, Swedish environmental law, EU policy, bioenergy, sustainability, strategy, regulation,</i>
	Environmental Conservation	<i>Biodiversity, species protection, habitat directive,</i>
	Restoration	<i>Nature restoration, thriving forests</i>
Industrial Development: Commercial Interests	Green Growth	<i>Green commodities, green energy, wind power, green vision</i>
	Economic Growth	<i>Production, forestry, forest industry, export, comparative advantage, GDP, GVA</i>
	Swedish Welfare	<i>Welfare, employment, education, taxes, jobs, indirect employment, direct employment, social security, housing, infrastructure, national competency</i>

Figure 4: *The Main Coding Framework*

As the analysis was conducted, there were also other categories found that did not in the end fit into the two themes. These are still included and operationalized here as they still reflect important aspects of this thesis. See freestanding categories in the figure 5 below.

Categories	Subcategories
MLG	<i>Administration, levels, multiple levels, jurisdictions, legislation, government agencies, EU, government, governance, public administration</i>
Ownership	<i>Private ownership, state ownership</i>
Regions	<i>Northern Sweden, municipalities, regions, body of ideas</i>

Figure 5: *Freestanding Categories*

4.5 Limitations of the Chosen Approach

As the case of the Swedish forestry debate—especially surrounding the NRR—is a very current and active case, it was at times difficult to formulate a clear idea on how to structure the research design and the research question. This led to difficulties with time management related with where to put limitations on the scope of the thesis. Triangulating the primary data, using both reports and interviews, and using the method of qualitative content analysis to analyze the data helped with narrowing down the scope and to keep on track. Although triangulating data tend to increase validity of the findings, the reproducibility of the methods and results in this thesis have not been tested, as it was a only one researcher conducting the research (Halperin and Heath, 2015, p. 175, 385).

Another aspect that can be brought up is the amount of primary data this thesis has gathered. If extending the dataset, the reliability of the findings may have increased and more nuances to the topic could have been found. In this thesis only two coalitions were found explicitly, but diving deeper into the topic—including actors such as political parties and looking more in-depth at *specific* corporations rather than corporations as an entity— could have resulted in more nuanced answers. What can be stated with certainty is that there are layers of this debate that has not been covered in the scope of this thesis. This thesis can however be seen and utilized as an introductory research on a topic that for further studies requires in-depth knowledge on Swedish forestry as well as a comprehension of current and historical Swedish business politics.

5. Results

This chapter will discuss the findings of the qualitative content analysis. The reports will be referred to as Report 1-4, as illustrated in Figure 2. Key concepts and findings from the literature review will be included as analytical lenses. The interviews will also add layers to the information provided by the reports. The chapter will further seek to formulate responses to the research question:

How do the different coalitions of the Swedish forestry sector shape the implementation of EU environmental legislation, such as the Nature Restoration Regulation?

5.1 The Reports: Summary of Findings

First and foremost, the difference in views on the utility of forests is an aspect that stood out in the reports. As each report has been developed by different actors with varying backgrounds and interests when it comes to the forestry sector, it was clear that there were diverging points of views on forestry and its significance. Report 1 came from a labor organization perspective, including both private owners of forests as well as corporations. Report 2 came from a large corporation, while Report 3 and 4 came from the government respectively an environmental organization. The reports all mention different actors that can will placed into coalitions in the next chapter and the different actors are portrayed in the figure connected with the respective reports. Although the Actor D did not issue any of the chosen reports, they were still central in Report 3.

Actor A	Actor B	Actor C	Actor D	Actor E
Private forest owners and small family businesses	Corporations	Environmental organizations: Naturskyddsföreningen WWF, Birdlife,	State agencies: Naturvårdsverket, Skogsstyrelsen	The Swedish government
Report 1	Report 2	Report 4	Report -	Report 3

Figure 6: *The Different Actors.*

Reports 1-3 tended to focus mostly on categories such as economic growth, Swedish welfare and environmental governance. It was clear in the reports that the forestry sector consists of industries of commercial significance in Sweden, especially in Northern Sweden (SCA,

20251b, p. 6). Report 2 included trade data from Northern Sweden, as operationalized in this thesis, showing the numbers of employees, tax revenues to local municipalities and regions, as well as social security checks. This data came from Eurostat, a statistics center for the EU (SCA, 20251b, p. 7). Report 4 tended to focus more on questioning the status quo of the SOU, and had a greater focus on issues revolving around environmental governance and environmental conservation. The following subheadings will divide the result discussion in the two main themes of the coding framework: Commercial Interests and Environmental Arguments.

5.1.1 Commercial Interests

Report 1 discussed the differences with direct employment in forestry and the forest industry, and indirect employment that can be exemplified as subcontractors or transport. According to Report 1, all in all the Swedish forestry sector employs 138 000 people, which in 2026 translates to roughly 1 percent of the Swedish population (Industriarbetsgivarna, 2025, p. 1). This number contrasts from Report 3 however, which stipulates that there are 120 000 people that are employed in the forestry sector (SOU, 2025, p. 30). Report 3 further tells us that the forestry sector has contributed approximately 2 percent to the Swedish Gross Domestic Product (GDP) during the time period between 1993-2022.

With a specific focus on Northern Sweden, Report 2 sheds further light upon the importance of the forestry sector for the welfare development of the northernmost regions as well as facilitating its green vision (SCA, 20251b, p. 23; Westin, 2023, p. 96). It concludes that its local municipalities are dependent on the forestry sector for not only jobs, but also for income from exports and other related activities that create economic value for the local communities (SCA, 20251b, p. 15). In the coding framework of this thesis, all wordings relating to work, employment, education, infrastructure and jobs, were put in **the Swedish Welfare category**, wordings such as export or production were put in **the Economic Growth category**, and wordings relating to green commodities were put in **the Green Growth category**.

Apart from work and employment, Report 2 also thoroughly discusses important prerequisites for conducting the forestry sector, with a central focus on the importance of a functioning infrastructure, sufficient education of personnel and improved local processes for permits (SCA, 2025; p. 15, 17, 19). A functioning infrastructure is important to secure long-term export stability of transporting heavy commodities in major industries such as paper and

pulp or wood, both when it comes to roads and railroads. Another trend that was pointed out, was that North Sweden may be facing a so-called knowledge drain (Westin, 2023, p. 113), where it already tends to be difficult for corporations to recruit knowledgeable and educated personnel (SCA, 20251b, p. 14). Infrastructure—or ”Robusta vägar” as named in the report—are similarly discussed in Report 3 as a necessity for the profitability of the forestry sector, and it suggests that there is a need for an improved, collective management around roads to ensure that they are all up to standard (SOU, 2025, p. 41). The Swedish Forest Agency and the Swedish Land Registration Authority (Lantmäteriet) are here mentioned as suggested actors to investigate these aspects and come up with a solution.

Report 2 also points to the fact that the value and utility of forests depends on the prerequisites for industrial production, and coins the word of ”regional social benefits” (SCA, 20251b, p. 9). Aside from adding value in the form of creating jobs and stimulating economic growth, wood as a material and wooden goods such as furniture has also historically been a Swedish export commodity, although paper and pulp is currently dominating the Swedish export arena along with for instance trucks (SCA, 20251b, p. 12). Report 3 further brings up the principle where the forestry sector should bear its own costs, a principle referring to the independence of forest owners and indicating the necessity of long-term planning (SOU, 2025, p. 30).

Another challenge that is lifted in Report 2, as aforementioned, are the local processes for permits. It is argued that the permit processes for practices such as clear cutting,¹¹ takes too long and impacts forest owners negatively. It is further argued that the Swedish Environmental Legislation (Miljöbalken) is written in a fashion where the authorized conduct can be loosely interpreted with issues such as species protection, which may result in infrequent decisions, depending on who is managing the case, and thereby result in economical insecurities for forest owners. Report 2 also mentions that the Swedish Agency for Nature has noted that there are more ”growing forests” rather than forests being cut down (SCA, 20251b, p. 9). Thus, Report 2 argues that environmental legislation should not be used to slow down forestry practices.

¹¹ Clear cutting can be explained as the practice of cutting down trees in a designated area for production purposes (KSLA, 2024, p. 6).

5.1.2 Environmental Interests

What was clear in Report 2 and Report 1 was that the forestry sector is highly connected to the welfare of municipalities and both Northern Sweden and Sweden as a whole. The Reports 1-3 all contain some discussion where it is important that policy decisions are made from evidence-based points of departures, and Report 3 suggests this as an additional extra advisory clause in the instruction of the Swedish Agency of Nature and the Swedish Agency of Forest. In Report 3 it is further suggested that the indicators of Swedish environmental goals, specifically "Thriving Forests" and "Limited Climate Impact", need to be overviewed and clarified (SOU, 2025, p. 101; Skogsstyrelsen, 20261b).

Report 3 stipulates that Sweden "wants to be a leading country" when it comes to climate, and environmental issues. At the same time, Report 4 argues that Report 3 is widely missing critical aspects when it comes to sustainability and does not agree with several of the suggestions. In Report 4 it is argued that the suggestions would not lead to a more sustainable forestry sector. Instead it is argued that an intensified forest industry would exacerbate environmental issues in the forests. Where Report 3 argues that there has been a positive development for the Swedish Environmental Goal of "Thriving Forests", Report 4 instead argues that it is the opposite, and that there are investigations that are organized quadrennially by the Swedish Forest Agency that supports this claim (Naturskyddsföreningen, 2025, p. 5). Report 4 further lift that it is an issue that the incumbent Swedish government has changed the direction of Swedish environmental aims, such as closing down the department of environment and replacing it with the department for climate and enterprise.

5.1.3 Other Aspects

Increased Europeanization (Judeu and Urziceanu, 2025, p. 379) has led to increased demands in reporting to the EU and central agencies. At the same time, the EU is working towards cohesive goals across Europe, with its EGD and related goals. Report 2 describes increased bureaucratic control as a threat, referring to policies deriving from the EU (SCA, 20251b, p. 23). Report 3 suggests the Swedish government to have an increased presence in EU-institutions to ensure that Swedish interests are adequately represented, since Sweden's businesses are much impacted by the EGD (SOU, 2025, p. 43). This is agreed to by Report 4 (Naturskyddsföreningen, 2025, p. 4), that also adds that a clear political will should not be drowned out by short-term industrial goals and industry voices, but instead replaced with transparency and expertise from Swedish government agencies.

5.2 The Interviews: Summary of Findings

It was clear from the interviewees, despite their different positions, that they were all deeply engaged with the Swedish forestry sector and had its best interest in mind when answering the pre-prepared questions. See Appendix in Chapter 10. Interviewee 1 represented the environmental organization WWF, while interviewee 2 represented the labor organization Norra Skog. The interviews were coded with the same coding framework as presented in Figure 4 and 5. The answers have been summarized in this section and translated into English.

5.2.1 Commercial Interests and Environmental Interests

Answering the second question, Interviewee 1 describes the Swedish forestry sector as a national competency, although there are EU initiatives within the EGD such as the Biodiversity Strategy, and now the NRR, that all forestry sectors ought to adjust to. Interviewee 1 further argued that the NRR was introduced as an initiative as there has been a need to solidify the existing policies and take further steps towards a "Gynnsam Bevarandestatus", which translates to "Favorable Conservation Status". Quote from Interviewee 1 in regards to the NRR:

"We have been very positive about it, as it is decided on EU level".

On the same question, Interviewee 3 answers that it is favorable to have some governance from outside of Sweden where a greater perspective is considered, mostly from a biodiversity point of view. There are however challenges with that as well, and they highlight the fact that directions from the EU level are not always well-received at the national and local levels. Similarly interviewee 2 points out that although the initiatives to restore nature may be well-intentioned, they may clash and create challenges with the implementation at the local level.

The Swedish version of the national plan for the implementation of the NRR, where interviewee 3 points to the government's decision to choose the year of 1995 as a reference year, may imply that the EU's aims to restore lands and water areas across Europe, is not fully supported on the national level. Interviewee 3 moves to explain that choosing the year of 1995 as a reference year in the Swedish national plan essentially means that the NRR will be implemented in a fashion that has as little impact on the competitiveness of Swedish businesses as possible. Quote from interviewee 3:

'It is quite clear that this regulation will be implemented in such a way that it has the least possible negative impact on the competitiveness in the Swedish business sector.'

Interviewee 1 also mentions the reference year of 1995 and further explains that letting short term interests win, will have negative consequences on multiple levels. Then there is also the non-deterioration requirement which is mentioned by both Interviewee 2 and 3. Interviewee 2 argues that there will be implementation challenges and that it may entail regional inequalities among forest owners as some areas have more of these types of nature or habitats that need to be protected. Interviewee 2 further means that there are risks that come with how the new legal frameworks are formulated, which may negatively impact the reception among forest owners as they might suddenly find themselves without capacity to farm their forests if certain areas need to stay protected. This may entail having to make certain forest areas into nature reserves. Quotes from interviewee 2:

"It becomes like a negative incentive. Instead of working with motivational incentives."

" [....]people are a part of nature as well"

Interviewee 1 finds the current national plan for implementing NRR, as quite positive, although there are areas where it could be improved and the person acknowledges that the government agencies behind it have done as well as they can from the directives they have had. As an answer to the fourth question, interviewee 3 also points out that there has been an ongoing extensive lobbyism from forest industries the past ten years, which may have influenced the directives on how the Swedish plan was to be designed, although the level of government agencies have made efforts to include more stakeholders. However, interviewee 1 similarly describes that the government mostly listens to the forest industry and that the level of government agencies has been more inclusive and included a broad variety of stakeholders. It is also described by Interviewee 1 that environmental organizations tend to be more active at the EU level.

Furthermore, Interviewee 2 lifts another aspect of where private forest owners may feel even further away from any decision-making process at the national or the EU level, although acknowledging that there have been efforts for dialogues revolving issues on NRR and other issues as well. Additionally, interviewee 2 says that it is also easy to fall into different silos

when it comes to environmental policy, depending on what aspect of forestry you are representing. Whether you are representing an environmental organization or whether you are a traditional forest owner.

Both interviewee 2 and interviewee 3 lift that there has not been many views presented from the political side yet, and that it may be connected with the fact that the final plan has not yet been submitted. When discussing the potential reactions of the Swedish national plan for NRR, interviewee 1 points to the fact that there are many more interest groups that may get involved in the outdoor recreation sector, and outdoor tourism. Interviewee 2 further highlights the strong emotional value of forestry, apart from the economic value. The final question of the interview focused on Northern Sweden specifically.

How would you describe impact of the forestry sector for the economic and social development in Northern Sweden and do you think this impact influences how environmental policies are implemented?

Interviewee 1 answered that the economic value of the forestry sector has majorly dropped in the last 30 years, both when it comes to the number of employees and the fact that the status of some related professions to the sector has declined. Another aspect that is brought up are the difficulties in the supply of the right skills as well as keeping up with new environmental regulations. Interviewee 1 even points out that major corporations, such as SCA have faced issues with international clients when not meeting the right sustainability criteria. Interviewee 3 similarly answers that the importance of the forestry sector in Northern Sweden is almost overrated, although of course in smaller towns with less inhabitants smaller industries such as sawmills may be of great importance for the welfare of that particular community. Interviewee 2 however points to a vaster perspective, where traditional forestry is of a great importance in Northern Sweden, where many inhabitants have connections to forestry somehow. It is also important to recognize that Northern Sweden is sparsely populated and that there are vast lands consisting of roughly half of Sweden's forests.

6. Theoretical Discussion and Analysis

In this chapter the findings will be discussed in the light of the theoretical framework that has been designed for this thesis. The chapter has been divided into two parts, first it will identify the coalitions that were found and then it will discuss how they shape the implementation of EU's environmental policies.

6.1 What Coalitions Were Found

6.1.1 The Different Actors on Multiple Levels

In the debate revolving around how to implement the NRR and what to prioritize in the Swedish forestry sector—commercial interests or environmental interests—one could argue that there are multiple actors that operate across multiple levels of structure and governance (Benz, Broschek, and Lederer, 2021, p. 2). There are both state-actors such as governmental agencies and the government, but also a wide range of non-governmental actors such as NGOs and corporations. In Sweden it is also important to separate bigger corporations, such as the SCA, with small family businesses that constitute the majority of Swedish forest owners today (Swedish Forest Industries, 20251b).

What has been clear in this research, is that there is a complexity to the Swedish forestry sector. Prerequisites for forestry may look different depending on where in Sweden one is looking, in this thesis the focus has been on Northern Sweden. There are also different relationships to forests. Some actors may view forests as part of their livelihood, whilst some may view it solely as a forum for recreation. Thus it can be said that there are different ideas depending on what actor you are looking at when opting to find out how to conduct forestry.

The overall governance of forests in the EU has previously been described as fragmented (Pülzl and Elomina, 2021, p. 9). From the EU's perspective, it is important to come in with a pan-European overview, while at the local levels in the member states, these new goals and ideas may seem unattainable (Hooghe and Marks, 2020, p. 821; Hooghe and Marks, 2020, p. 822). Here it is important to remember that the option to withstand economically amidst new environmental policies, that requires heavy documentation and increased involvement of government agencies, is sometimes not available for small business owners (Lim et al., 2018, p. 7-9). For them it may become a trade-off between long-term environmental stability and long-term financial stability.

Member states do, through the principle of subsidiarity, possess the authority to find their own ways to implement strategies from the EU. This may however, as mentioned in Report 4, not always be a positive thing as member states may change direction over the course of a change in government. Sudden changes in governments comes with risks that essentially impacts long-term stability and planning of implementation strategies. The agency of leaders, inspiring and motivating people to head in a specific direction, has in previous research also been proven to be important (Pollex and Lenschow, 2024, p. 2217). Changing governments and changing directions too often can perhaps therefore be described as a recipe for expensive policy discontinuation resulting in turmoil among conflicting political parties.

Nevertheless, long-term planning has been proven to be essential when it comes to environmental issues. As Interviewee 1 pointed out, making changes in natural environments—such as restoration—may take time and this fact needs to be taken into consideration when making sustainable planning for the future. Perhaps this is why Mattias Casula found in his research that supervision from a higher form of government is needed to monitor all different actors that are connected to a specific issue to avoid implementation gaps (2021, p. 1049). As the EU may not be involved in the more practical and technical issues that need to be met at the local levels, it might be easier to set out goals that are focusing on the bigger picture, beyond contemporary economic constraints that member states are facing. It is however important to note that there needs to be sufficient tools for implementation when creating big goals (Lim et al., 2018, p. 10). Otherwise, as Interviewee 1 described it, it might seem almost undemocratic, as there are goals that are voted through and set up which no one has the ability or the will to follow. Perhaps this could be related to democratic backsliding (Svensson, Wallin and Droste, 2026, p. 60).

Furthermore, a comparison that can be drawn between the case study of this thesis and to what Casula researched, is viewing the actors in the Swedish forestry debate as being part of a network system, MLG Type II. In this type of system the actors create networks together that influence the debate from various perspectives (Hooghe and Marks, 2003, p. 236-237; Casula, 2021, p. 1066). The two perspectives—or themes—that were in focus of this thesis and put against each other were the commercial interests versus the environmental interests. In Sweden, there are on the one hand large corporations, such as the SCA, that own huge forest areas, especially in Northern Sweden, along with paper and pulp industries along the northwest coast. On the other hand, there are environmental organizations such as WWF, with

a huge lobbyist network internationally, that highly prioritizes and monitors the implementation of new environmental legislation.

6.1.2 Ownership and Coalitions

Furthermore, what was also found is that there is in Sweden a division when it comes to the commercial interest perspective due to the high level of private ownership. Historically, Sweden's forestry has mostly been based upon family-oriented multi-use household production, which still persists today although large-scale production-oriented forestry has taken a stronger hold amidst globalization (Zhang, Mårald and Bjärstig, 2022, p. 430). Private owners of forests are still today often smaller family businesses where the economic implications of adhering to new environmental regulations can hit hard. New regulations may thereby create tensions between having to adhere to new sets of rules while having to keep business going as usual.

Although the economic implications of implementing the new policies may create negative reactions, the forest owners would be likely to still care for the vitality of their forests and have their best interest in mind from a long-term perspective. Opting for long-term sustainability in small-scale forestry can also be argued to be a part of what it is like to run a successful business and making sure it will survive for generations to come. Perhaps it can be described as an ecosystem in itself. If looking back at the gist of the concept of a just transition that is widely mentioned in both the EGD and the SDGs, it would be fitting to apply this concept here as well (Domorenok and Gatti, 2026, p. 3).

Interviewee 2 further described that new, environmental legislation could create feelings of unfairness amongst private forest owners, having to adjust their long-term plans for their forests and do more administration as it would impact their means of livelihood and economic viability. An example could be that it turns out a portion of a forest needs to become a nature reserve to protect a specific endangered species, putting the forest owner in a difficult economic position as they would have to change their long-term harvesting plan. Here one can ponder on Ostrom's findings, where central legislation is not always the solution when governing such complexity as the commons (Ostrom, 2008, p. 3).

The search for conflicting and similar reactions to the EU's environmental policies (Casula, 2021, p. 1066) have been guiding the thesis when evaluating what coalitions there may be at the foundation of this debate. What was found was that private forest owners and larger corporations may be grouped together into one coalition when looking at certain

arguments that benefit the interests of Swedish businesses. This coalition can be called the coalition of commercial interests. In this coalition the government can also be included, as it has been clearly shown when it comes to the implementation of the NRR, that it opts for solutions where the NRR is implemented as lightly as possible. This coalition can therefore said to conflict with aspects of the EU's aspirations for European forest policy, particularly as outlined in the Forest Strategy 2030, where forest-related policies focusing on issues such as nature conservation tend to take the upper-hand and not the other way around (Gordeeva, Wolfslehner and Weber, 2025, p. 1).

To nuance it further, opting to focus on economic stability and market competitiveness does not necessarily mean that Swedish family businesses or larger corporations wish to conduct unsustainable forestry. It means however that they are advocating for better prerequisites to conduct sustainable forestry in a way where the economic burden is not as heavy and where disparities for well-being are not threatened (Markannen and Anger-Kravi, 2019, p. 828). Swedish forest owners may thereby reap the benefits of relying on the lobbyist muscles of larger corporations, advocating for Swedish competitiveness in the business sector and for the overall importance of forestry to the Swedish economy. The motivations behind advocating toward similar goals may not however be shared inside the coalition, where traditional Swedish forestry may be regarded as more of a lifestyle and a tradition over generations rather than a multimillion type of business.

On the other side, there are groups that seek to argue in favor of new environmental legislation and this study groups environmental organizations together with governmental agencies such as the Swedish Nature Agency. These groups will in this thesis be put together as the second identified coalition called the coalition for environmental interests. Swedish governmental agencies follow directives from the EU, although also directives from the government, while environmental organizations are solely lobbying toward the protection and improving of environmental surroundings. Perhaps it can be said that it is the groups advocating for, formulating and opting to implement the policies that are placed in this group. Even policy-makers at the EU level pushing policies forward and setting new standards and norms for EU member states (Judeu and Urziceanu, 2025, p. 379; Gordeeva Wolfslehner and Weber, 2025, p. 1).

Naturskyddsföreningen was clear in their report, Report 4, that they were skeptical toward several of the suggestions made in Report 3. One of the suggestions was to remove free service counseling from the Swedish Forest Agency directed at forest owners. In a time where

new regulations such as the NRR is to be implemented, this might however be what Swedish forest owners need to be able to implement it correctly on their respective properties. The coalition of environmental interests can thereby perhaps be said to not only advocate for the implementation of new environmental policies, but also for the prerequisites of the people and businesses impacted to do so.

6.2 How These Coalitions Shape the Implementation

6.2.1 Policy Entrepreneurs and the NRR

It can be argued that these two coalitions that have been identified, shape the Swedish debate around implementation in various ways. On the one hand, the first coalition of commercial interests may view environmental legislation stemming from the EU such as the NRR almost as a punishment, while the other coalition of environmental interests view the NRR as a possibility and an instrument for positive change. In each coalition, it can further be described that there are policy entrepreneurs (Kingdon, 2014, p. 113) that push specific issues forward to the political agenda. As an example, many environmental organizations have had a strong presence in Brussels, which is likely to have influenced the environmental policies that have been created (Svensson, Wallin and Droste, 2026, p. 36). In the commercial interest coalition it is perhaps more actors that are highly positioned in large corporations, with higher liquidity and established muscles for lobbying, that can be explained as policy entrepreneurs.

In the environmental interest coalition it is the environmental organizations, that are also established lobbyists, that push and pull certain issues onto the agenda (Bjärstig and Eckergren, 2025, p. 92). As mentioned by Interviewee 1 and described by Bjärstig and Eckergren, nature stretches across administrative and national boundaries and from an umbrella perspective it is quite easy to come together and think about how to govern it. In practice however, the environment is a difficult area to govern due to the varying prerequisites of the different administrative levels and regions.

Nevertheless, in the case of the NRR, Interviewee 1 pointed out that it was created due to the lack of results of previous EU environmental strategies. This can be connected to the trend that has been seen in later years amidst the adoption of the Forest Strategy 2030, where it has been a movement towards more binding frameworks that puts higher pressure on member states when it comes to implementation (Gordeeva, Wolfslehner and Weber, 2025, p. 2). Perhaps one can argue that the NRR is a result of lobbyism on the EU level from

environmental organizations to protect the wildlife and nature in Europe (Weible and Jenkins-Smith, 2025, p. 10). Long-term trends of sustainability and increased pressure from the effects of climate change (Westin, 2023, p. 96), could be argued as opportunities that made a regulation such as the NRR get accepted by the European Parliament.

6.2.2 Potential Policy Windows

Moreover, it is also interesting to think about the resistance to the NRR, where attitudes to increased EU environmental governance has not been particularly well-received at the government level, if to trust Report 4. If defining policy windows to push for an alternative agenda, to not implement the NRR, it is important to remember the current global state of affairs (Kingdon, 2014, p. 165-166). There has been multiple economical crises in Sweden since the incumbent government took office in 2022. Soaring energy and food prices that have impacted north and south Sweden differently, and global geopolitical tensions as well as a rise of populist parties across Europe. All these events can perhaps be interpreted as having created a longing for stability, not only for forest owners but for everyone affected. It is at the same time an urgency to find measures to adapt to climate change and to restore nature. As Max Koch describes it, there need to be a balance between ecological ceilings and social floors (Koch, 2015, p. 1671).

Furthermore, Northern Sweden as a region has faced challenges on its own, with people moving out of the region, and having new green industry developments while facing risks connected with the ability to sustain sufficient welfare services and livelihoods (Westin, 2023, p. 113). This would also put extra pressure on private forest owners and small business owners. On the other hand, the green industry stamp that has been placed on Northern Sweden can perhaps also be interpreted as a type of policy window for the coalition of environmental interests. Environmental organizations and other related actors advocating for nature restoration and preservation in the forests of Northern Sweden align with the brand and the new identity of Northern Sweden as a green region (Söderbaum, 2019, p. 26).

Without falling too deep into this trail, what these aspects tells us is that it is still important to recognize that there are multiple factors in which coalitions find arguments and power to advocate their causes. These factors will in the next lead influence how coalitions shape the implementation of the EU's environmental legislation.

7. Conclusion

This thesis has been based on the assumption that since the forest industry contributes to Swedish welfare, through jobs and taxes, it creates a dilemma when having to adjust and adhere to the EU's environmental policies and legislation. What was found is that the debate is very complex, and that there are multiple arguments to why Sweden now is at risk of facing implementation gaps when it comes to new environmental legislation such as the NRR (Casula, 2021, p. 1049). In this chapter, three conclusions will be drawn, and an answer to the research question will be provided.

Firstly, there are several actors in the Swedish forestry debate and some of them have stronger voices than others. A majority of Sweden's forests are owned by private owners, often connected to smaller family businesses, where forestry sometimes is linked to generational traditions and a general way of life (Zhang, Mårald and Bjärstig, 2022, p. 430). However, there are still other voices with stronger muscles to advocate and lobby toward certain goals that are more on the commercial side. These voices often come from larger industrial corporations and networks of environmental organizations. This thesis has identified two main coalitions revolving around the debate of the Swedish forestry sector and the implementation of EU's environmental legislations, with a focus on the NRR. The two coalitions that were identified were one opting for more commercial interests of forestry and the other one for environmental interests.

Secondly, another important finding to bring up is the fact that there seems to be differing views in the debate when it comes to long-term planning. Although environmental policies are often made with the logic that we need to preserve nature for future generations, forestry in itself is a business that rests upon the principle of long-term planning. Forests take time: to grow, to gain value and to potentially later be refined. It might therefore not make sense to create environmental frameworks, where many smaller businesses are forced to resort to short-term economic solutions and choose not to implement new policies in the most favorable way, in order to stay profitable. It might therefore be of importance for legislators and policy-makers to find ways to make regulations such as the NRR more socially sustainable where forest owners and landowners are less economically affected or even threatened. This would perhaps be a helpful initiative to gain better results when it comes to implementation and reduce implementation gaps (Gordeeva, Wolfslehner and Weber, 2025, p. 16; Lim et al., 2018, p. 10).

Lastly, it can be stated that although it is true that forestry and the forest industry may be very important for the welfare development of communities in Sweden, specifically Northern Sweden—which was the focus of this thesis—it is not all about the work that is directly connected to the forestry sector. For some municipalities in Northern Sweden, industries and factories play an important for creating jobs and thereby contribute to their welfare stability. The jobs connected to the forestry sector created in other related sectors, such as transportation and technological innovation. It can also be local pizzerias or local shops that pop up where there is a local industry which also makes the communities more attractive for its residents (Westin, 2023, p. 101).

This thesis was based upon the assumption that Swedish welfare, through jobs and taxes, creates a dilemma when having to adjust to the EU's environmental legislation. Perhaps it can be stated that yes, communities that are dependent on industry stemming from forestry, it may be stated that long-term welfare stability is dependent on the forestry sector. However, it was also clear that Sweden's welfare system is not dependent on forestry per se, with regards to the municipal equalization system (Ohlsson, 2025) but that it is important to keep in mind forestry's cultural significance as well. Therefore Swedish forestry sector and welfare can be said to have a connection, in a way where forestry may be interpreted and pointed out as a societal backbone for the Swedish economy and a significant pillar of Sweden's identity. These aspects are important and should be taken into consideration by policy-makers when making new environmental policies.

8. Future Research

The forestry debate in Sweden has been high up on the political agenda and it is important to note that its current directions might change again soon, with the potential change in government in September 2026. As for future research it could be interesting to further look at how Swedish forestry policy has shifted over the years depending on what government it has. Another aspect to further look into could be similar to what Helena Pülzl and Helga Elomina researched, on how forests are framed, but with a specific focus on the Swedish forestry debate and compare more in-depth how different types of forest owners view forests and their utility (2021, p. 9).

Under the framing umbrella, it is clear from this thesis already clear that there are different views on forests—also within the coalitions— which impacts how environmental policies from the EU are received. Factors such as economic equality and societal participation could be important aspects to dive deeper into, especially when it comes to the implications for the indigenous Sámi people in Northern Sweden (Markkanen and Anger-Kravi, 2019, p. 829). Perhaps it could be interesting to compare ideas relating to Northern Sweden as a green growth region and the fact that this may have a negative impact on Sápmi, where the Sámi people live. What implications does the green growth trend in north Sweden have for socio-ecological sustainability?

This thesis has shown that it is important to consider both welfare and social implications when formulating green or environmental policies to ensure improved and more efficient future processes of implementation. The sustainability umbrella does not only include environmental and economical goals, it is also about social goals and the social welfare of people. People are a part of nature as well. It is therefore important to also recognize that people need capabilities to do right by nature, especially living in an age where we are learning new aspects everyday. Education plays a crucial role here as well as a functioning communication between different levels of governance along with a cohesive goal (Paulsson, et al. 2025, p. 115-116). That is where the EU comes in, to take on the role as a guiding lighthouse. It is although up to each member state to find their own ways to follow EUs guiding principles and to hopefully aim to do it as well as they can.

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10. Appendix

Welfare Policies and Management Program
Field: Political Science
Lund University
Student Name: Moa Gustafsson
Master's thesis



LUND UNIVERSITY

Information om medgivande

Det här dokumentet skickas för att informera medverkande om intervjufrågorna för den kommande intervjun samt för att informera om medgivande som efterfrågas inför att medverka i intervjun.

Medverkande har rätt till full anonymitet om så efterfrågas. Medverkande kommer att få frågan innan intervjun och inspelning startar, om grad av önskad anonymitet: om de vill medverka med namn, organisation och position. Medverkande kommer även att få svara på om de ger medgivande till att intervjun spelas in. Syftet med att spela in intervjun är för att senare kunna transkribera samtalet för att det ska kunna användas som material för en innehållsanalys. Uppsatsen kommer sedan att publiceras på Lunds universitets hemsida, LUP Student Papers.

På sida två av detta dokument finns sex frågor som intervjun kommer kretsa kring. Intervjun kommer att vara designad som en semi-strukturerad intervju. Tack för din medverkan!

Forskningssammanfattning

Den här studien kretsar kring temat flernivåstyrning (Multilevel Governance) och policyanpassning (Policy Translation) med fokus på Norra Sverige och skogsbruket. Inom ramen för studien kommer den Europeiska Unionens (EU:s) naturrestaureringsförordning vara central. Studiens antagande, att skogsbruket bidrar till den svenska välfärden, bland annat i mån av jobb och skatteintäkter, är baserat på en rapport från Industriarbetsgivarna och utifrån en utredning från Statens Offentliga Utredningar från 2025 (SOU, 2025; Industriarbetsgivarna, 2025). Det kan därmed möjligen påstås bli ett dilemma vid nya miljölagstiftningar där målet med dessa, möjligen kan komma att påverka andra aspekter.

Denna studie kretsar därmed kring dikotomin mellan att bevara samt att återställa natur, och främjandet av industriell utveckling samt ekonomisk tillväxt. Här kommer de faktorer som påverkar hur miljöpolicy, i form av lagar och förordningar, tolkas och översätts bli centrala. Forskningsfrågan som jag ämnar att använda ger en helhetsbild, från ett europeiskt perspektiv, där jag efterfrågar hur länders ekonomiska beroende (*reliance*) på sina respektive industrier, påverkar deras förmåga att anpassa sig till miljöpolicy som kommer ifrån EU. Den svenska skogsindustrin i Norra Sverige utgör studiens fallstudie.

Sida 1



Frågorna

1. Börja gärna med att berätta lite om din bakgrund, din roll och din erfarenhet av arbete med skogsindustrin eller miljöpolicy rörande skog?
2. Vilka ser du som de största utmaningarna och de främsta fördelarna med implementeringen av EU:s naturrestaureringsförordning till den svenska skogssektorn? På vilken nivå; lokal, regional eller EU, och för vilka aktörer, blir utmaningarna tydligast?
3. Kan du ge ett eller flera exempel från den svenska nationella planen, på hur EU:s naturrestaureringsförordning har tolkats eller anpassats till svensk kontext, som du anser vara av extra vikt?
4. Vilka aktörer skulle du främst benämna som centrala, även kallade *stakeholders*, i den svenska skogsindustrin och hur skulle du beskriva deras inflytande över hur EU:s miljöpolicy, såsom naturrestaureringsförordningen, tolkas (översätts) och implementeras?
5. Hur ser samverkan ut mellan olika aktörer rörande frågan om implementeringen av naturrestaureringsförordningen, såsom myndigheter på nationell och EU nivå, icke-statliga organisationer, och företag, och finns det spänningar mellan dessa?
6. Hur skulle du beskriva skogsindustrins betydelse för den ekonomiska och sociala utvecklingen i norra Sverige, och tror du att denna betydelse har en inverkan på hur miljöpolicy implementeras?



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