

DECISION OF THE 1ST CONGRESS OF THE VÕRO PEOPLE ON PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

Adopted in the town of Võro, on 22 April, 2023

1. **The Võro people regard their land as a divine part of nature that has been received from ancestors and has been cultivated with work, which must be passed on to next generations in a clean and healthy condition.**
2. The Võro people take in all their activities into account the people of the present as well as the future.
3. The Võro people recognise that nature is not an aggregation of resources, but has its own soul and inherent value, and hence is also a holder of rights. As Indigenous people, the Võro people join the movement of recognising the rights of nature.
4. The Võro people protect their environment, use moderately what is needed, do not waste natural resources.
 - The Võro people have a right to protect their environment from poisons, waste, noise and artificial light.
 - The Võro people value water and keep the water clean – springs, wells, brooks, puddles, rivers, lakes. We do not waste water.
 - The Võro people have a wish, need and right to grow organic food.
5. The Võro people have a wish and right to manage forests in a sustainable, forward-looking, and responsible way, and decide about the fate of their communal forests together with the community. For that, the Võro people will follow principles of good forest management.
 - 1) Cross-trees, cross-forests and other sacred sites in forests will remain untouched by forest-felling and other activities that harm them;
 - 2) Most forest works are done in winter, when possible with snow and frozen earth;
 - 3) In spring and summer, when birds are nesting and animals have offspring, no harvesters or forwarders, neither chainsaws nor clearing saws operate in forests;
 - 4) Continuous cover forestry and small-scale selection cutting is preferred;
 - 5) If clearcutting is practiced, then clearcutting areas are small, no larger than 1 hectare;

- 6) Thick (diameter at breast height over 20 cm) dry trees and thick fallen trees at least 20-30 m³/ha are left in the forest, assuming that such trees exist, because they are essential for woodpeckers (biggest natural enemies of bark beetles) and other forest species;
 - 7) Forests near urban settlements and other forests important for local communities are managed in addition to maintenance cutting only with selection cutting and regeneration cutting, no clearcutting is practiced; local communities themselves say how far the near proximity of urban settlements extend, and what are the other important forests for communities;
 - 8) If there is a plan to fell forest near the border of a land plot, or if it is planned to move out forest material through someone else's land, then before initiating felling, contact is established with border neighbours, near whose plots felling is planned, and with landowners, on whose lands the transport of forest material is planned.
6. If the customs and unwritten laws of the Võro people about the protection of lands, forests and other environment differ from state laws, the traditional laws of the Võro people (as represented in folklore, proverbs, traditional knowledge and collective memory) as Indigenous people must be taken into account.
 7. The Võro people decide about the usage of Vana-Võromaa's natural resources and lands. If it is deemed necessary to extract some natural resource, then the majority of the profits must stay with the Võro people. Depending on what is planned, the Võro people affected by the action are consulted with. In the decision-making of a significant part of decisions affecting the Võro people, the consent of the Council of Elders of the Congress of the Võro people must be obtained.
 8. If the consent of the Võro people is not obtained, the state cannot use the land for national projects, which would destroy the living environment and health of the Indigenous people.
 9. Farming and animal husbandry in Vana-Võromaa can be conducted according to the traditions of the Indigenous people.
 10. If some laws must be amended to implement these points, then this must be done.