

# Community Assessment Report – Wetlands in Värmdö

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## 1. Purpose and Background of the Assessment

Värmdö Skärgård Rotary Club, together with partners nationally and internationally, intends to apply for a Global Grant from The Rotary Foundation to carry out an environmental project on Värmdö, Sweden. The main goal of the project is to establish new wetlands to improve water quality, strengthen biodiversity, contribute to climate adaptation, and create local ecosystem services.

Before the project plan is developed, this Community Assessment was conducted to ensure that the initiative is relevant, anchored, and sustainable in the long term from the perspective of the local community. The assessment aims to identify the community's strengths, resources, needs, and priorities in relation to the wetland issue, as well as to build relationships with relevant stakeholders.

Restoring wetlands near the Baltic Sea provides significant ecological and economic benefits, primarily through increased biodiversity, improved water quality, and climate regulation. These ecosystems function as natural nutrient sinks and reduce eutrophication by absorbing excess nitrogen and phosphorus from agricultural runoff, which is crucial for the health of the Baltic Sea (Żylicz, 1993). In addition, the restoration of wetlands has been shown to increase fish stocks, such as pike, which are vital for maintaining the coastal ecosystem balance (Tibblin et al., 2023).

### 1.1. Ecological benefits

**Improvement of biodiversity:** Restored wetlands support flora and fauna and provide habitats for various species (Tibblin et al., 2023).

**Improvement of water quality:** Wetlands filter pollutants before they reach the Baltic Sea and thereby combat eutrophication (Żylicz, 1993).

### 1.2. Economic benefits

**Ecosystem services:** Wetlands provide services such as flood control, water purification, and carbon sequestration, which can lead to cost savings in environmental management (Collaro, 2015).

**Public support and funding:** Citizens in Baltic Sea countries express willingness to invest in wetland restoration for improved water quality and ecosystem health (Giergiczny et al., 2022).

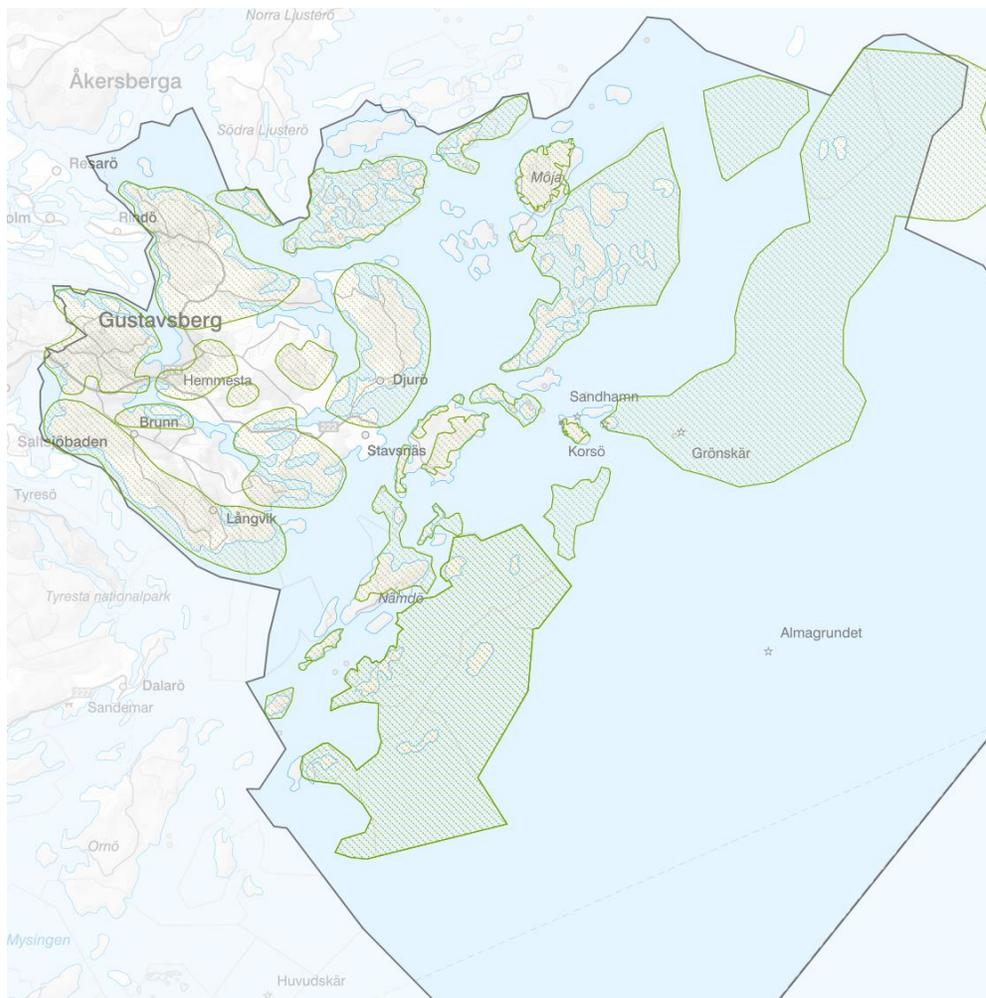
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Although the benefits of wetland restoration are significant, challenges remain, including the need for sustainable financing and public engagement to ensure the long-term success and maintenance of these vital ecosystems.

## 2. Description of the community

### 2.1. Geography and location

Värmdö Municipality is located in the Stockholm archipelago and consists of both mainland and a large number of islands. The municipality has a mix of densely populated areas, rural areas, and large natural areas, which makes it geographically diverse.



*Map of Värmdö Municipality. The marked areas are of great importance for biodiversity, according to the municipality's inventory.*

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## **2.2. Demography**

The municipality has approximately 48,000 inhabitants (2024), with both permanent residents and a large number of holiday homes. The population is mixed, with many families with children, elderly people, and households living seasonally. Population growth has been high and puts pressure on both infrastructure and the environment.

## **2.3. Economy and employment**

Households generally have a high income level, but there are also rural areas with agriculture and forestry, small businesses, and tourism. Many commute to Stockholm. There is also strong engagement in non-profit associations, particularly within nature, environment, and outdoor life.

## **2.4. Environment and natural resources**

Värmdö is characterised by proximity to water and sensitive ecosystems. Eutrophication of lakes and sea bays is a known problem. Climate change means increased risks of flooding and affects both groundwater and ecosystems. At the same time, there is great potential for nature-based solutions such as wetlands that can help to reduce these effects.

## **2.5. Previous initiatives**

The municipality has worked with various forms of water management, including stormwater management and restoration of lakes. Several local landowners have shown interest in collaboration in ecological projects. There is also previous experience of cooperation between civil society and the municipality in the environmental field.

# **3. Methods and data collection**

To collect qualitative information, a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with various stakeholders representing civil society in Värmdö. The aim was to capture a multifaceted view of the community's perception of environmental challenges and the opportunities associated with creating wetlands. Question template – see appendix.

## **3.1. Implementation**

- Method: Qualitative interviews, approximately 20–50 minutes per session.
- Number: Planned number of interviews is approximately 15.
- Selection: Strategic selection of community representatives from different sectors, who are expected to have a large contact network in the local community, including politicians, officials, sport fishers, birdwatchers, the church, researchers, and leaders in youth activities.
- Implementation period: Summer 2025.

## **3.2. Strengths of the method**

- In-depth understanding of local values, concerns, and expectations.
- Enables adaptation to different target groups' perspectives.

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### 3.3. Limitations

- Small sample size may exclude certain perspectives.
- Certain selection bias as participants were chosen by the project group, a so-called convenience sample.

## 4. Data and key findings

### 4.1. Community strengths and resources

Värmdö is described by many interviewees as a place with strong natural values and great commitment to the environment. The proximity to water, untouched nature, birdlife, outdoor areas, and already existing examples of restored wetlands (e.g. Hemmesta sjöäng) are often mentioned as positive resources. There are also a large number of associations and organisations – such as Sportfiskarna, the birdwatchers, Sjöscouterna, Friluftsförbundet, and the Church of Sweden – which form a vibrant part of the local civil society.

Several respondents highlight good experiences of collaboration, for example between the municipality, the county administrative board, researchers, and voluntary forces. Some landowners show a strong interest in nature and are open to making land available or participating in environmental work. The municipality is perceived by several as positive and active in nature conservation.

### 4.2. Identified needs and challenges

A broad perception among respondents is that the Baltic Sea is in poor condition, and that eutrophication, algal blooms, and disappearing predatory fish (such as pike) are major problems. Wetlands are highlighted by many as a possible solution to reduce nutrient leakage, increase biodiversity, and regulate water flows.

Among the challenges are the attitudes of landowners, long-term commitment to maintenance, and difficulties in arousing public engagement. Technical obstacles – such as permit processes, the risk of upstream flooding, or impact on grazing – are also mentioned. Several interviewees emphasise the need for clear objectives and for anchoring the project with both landowners and the general public.

### 4.3. Historical experiences

There are several good examples of successful wetland projects in the local area. Hemmesta sjöäng is often mentioned as a model, both functionally and as a destination. Other examples are Lemshaga, Morträsket, Rudsjön, and restoration projects in collaboration with Sportfiskarna and the County Administrative Board. Several respondents participate or have participated in previous projects and see them as educational, but also point out that some maintenance is required for the effects to last.

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Historically, many wetlands have been drained for agriculture or forestry, which some still see as legitimate, depending on land use. There is a need for balance between different land interests.

#### **4.4. Cultural and value-related factors**

Environmental commitment, interest in nature, and local knowledge characterise many interviews. There is an appreciation of the intrinsic value of nature, but also a practical understanding of the economic use of land. Several interviewees emphasise the importance that measures should not be perceived as imposed by authorities. A recurring theme is that information, participation, and good communication are crucial to creating acceptance and long-term local anchoring.

Young people's relationship with nature is highlighted as important – especially if there are educational elements and the opportunity to “see something happen” in nature. Being able to show concrete results and create positive examples is mentioned as the key to future acceptance.

#### **4.5. Priorities according to the interviewees**

##### **Local politicians**

Local politicians are committed to the environment and proud of what the municipality is doing, but at the same time well aware of the problems that remain. These concern eutrophication and the municipality's chemical and ecological status, including old environmental sins and leaking landfills.

The municipality has recently adopted a water plan to improve the situation. Wetlands are seen as part of the solution to the problems and the municipality is very positive towards an increased number of wetlands. The wetland at Hemmesta Sjöäng is highlighted as a model.

It is important to spread information about the positive effects of wetlands and to organise activities such as “wetland days”. If citizens can participate hands-on, engagement and understanding will be created. Collaboration between the municipality, landowners, and citizens is also important to give the wetlands the maintenance they need.

##### **Officials at local and regional level**

Officials, both from the municipality and the County Administrative Board, emphasise the importance of sustainable management of natural resources. Wetlands are seen as very positive, and restoration and new creation of such are included in the municipality's climate and environmental plan. The value for biodiversity and for water purification is emphasised. Eutrophication can be reduced and wetlands can contribute to improved water quality and also regulate flows during cloudbursts.

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At the same time, the importance of clear anchoring with landowners and that long-term maintenance is crucial for the wetland's function over time is underlined. A well-functioning wetland creates an attractive nature experience for visitors. Engagement from the public must be maintained, and awareness of the benefits of wetlands should increase. This can be done, among other things, through school visits and cooperation with voluntary organisations during "wetland days". The cooperation with Rotary and other associations that carry out conservation efforts is appreciated!

### **Landowners**

Landowners are generally positive towards wetlands, but under certain conditions. They call for clear objectives, practically functioning solutions, and a long-term plan for maintenance. For example, water levels must be adapted to grazing so that animals do not get stuck in wet ground. It is important to have dialogue at an early stage and to take into account existing land use. A well thought-out basis and the possibility of follow-up of effects are crucial for their participation.

### **People engaged in environmental organisations**

People from environmental organisations work for people to live in harmony with ecosystems and to see this as a fundamental part of "sustainability".

All are positive towards wetlands and towards creating more of them in Värmdö. Wetlands are perceived as a resource for biodiversity and climate action, especially through their ability to bind carbon and create habitats for both plants and animals. They are vital areas that contribute to life in both fauna and flora. Wetlands, especially coastal ones, are important for supporting fish reproduction and life cycles.

Wetlands are a relatively simple but effective solution for the environment. However, it requires long-term commitment to ensure that they function optimally for both the ecosystem and the local surroundings. The responsibility for maintenance must be clarified.

The level of knowledge about the benefits of wetlands is increasing but is still relatively low, and a major challenge is to increase engagement in such projects by informing about their benefits. Not least, the importance of involving children and young people to create long-term environmental commitment is emphasised.

### **Locally engaged adults**

Several emphasise the need to create long-term engagement through anchoring in the local community. Wetland projects should contribute to understanding nature's cycles and the importance of ecosystems. There is a clear value in including families with children, schools, and young people in experience-based activities. Some also point to the wetland's potential to be a place for recovery, tranquillity, and reflection. The connection between humans, nature, and responsibility is central.

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## Young people and youth leaders

Young people value practical participation – to be able to see, touch, understand. Wetlands that provide close contact with birds, fish, fish fry, frogs, and plants are seen as exciting. There is a strong interest in combining outdoor life, learning, and environmental conservation. Both scouts and school youth see wetlands as natural arenas for knowledge and community. Well-maintained paths, signage, and accessibility are highlighted as important factors. Youth leaders also see wetland projects as an opportunity to create encounters across generational and cultural boundaries.

## 5. Possible project areas to prioritise

Here, possible directions that emerged in the interviews are presented – they are not finished solutions nor an exhaustive survey.

### 5.1. Environmental measures

- Restoration or rehabilitation of wetlands that reduce nutrient leakage into the Baltic Sea.
- Creation of pike factories and other spawning areas for predatory fish.
- Protection of existing wetlands with high biological values.
- Damming and rewetting of drained land where it does not conflict with other land uses.

### 5.2. Educational and social elements

- Establishment of trails, observation platforms, and information signs around wetlands.
- Implementation of nature education activities, particularly aimed at children and young people.
- “Wetlands Day” – public events showcasing life in the wetland (for example pike migration).
- Cooperation with schools, associations, and the local community to create understanding of the functions of wetlands.

### 5.3. Community anchoring and local responsibility

- Clear dialogue with landowners from the start, with a shared vision.
- Create a reference group with representatives from civil society.
- Inventory of possible sites together with local actors.
- A plan for future maintenance (municipality, association, landowner) should be established early.
- Training and engagement of “caretaker groups” for maintenance and follow-up.

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## **6. Feedback and continued cooperation**

### **6.1. Feedback to participants**

An initial feedback session is planned in connection with the completion of the community assessment report. All interviewees will receive a summary in written form.

### **6.2. Feedback from the community**

Feedback has so far mainly taken place in informal conversations. Several interviewees express appreciation for the opportunity to contribute, and are eager to continue following the project's development. There is an explicit interest from the interviewees that the results are communicated further to decision-makers in Värmdö municipality and other concerned organisations.

### **6.3. Continued cooperation**

Continued cooperation is planned with, among others:

- Landowners in the intended project area.
- Associations such as Sportfiskarna, Friluftsförbundet, Sjöscouterna, the Church of Sweden, and bird clubs.
- The municipality's environmental and planning officers.
- The County Administrative Board's wetland coordinator.

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## 7. References

### Scientific articles

Collaro, C., 2015. Ecosystem Wetlands Restoration Approach for Sustainable Development Planning. i: u.o.:IGI Global, p. 293-2941.

Giergiczny, M. et al., 2022. Re-meander, rewet, rewild! Overwhelming public support for restoration of small rivers in the three Baltic Sea basin countries. *Restoration Ecology*, 30(5), p. 1-10.

Tibblin, P. et al., 2023. Higher abundance of adult pike in Baltic Sea coastal areas adjacent to restored wetlands compared to reference bays. *Hydrobiologia*, Volume 850, p. 2049-2060.

Zylic, T., 1993. The ecological economics of the Baltic Sea. *European Review*, 1(4), p. 329-335.

### Värmdö Municipality's Comprehensive Plan

<https://www.varmdo.se/samhalleochtrafik/samhallsplanering/oversiktsplan.4.5108a8bb16e40e092a3a8263.html>

### Interviews

Gustaf Almqvist, Project Manager, [County Administrative Board of Stockholm](#)

Jenny Bylund, Water Strategist, [Värmdö Municipality](#)

Ingela Bäckström, Secretary-General, [Svealandskusten Water Conservation Association](#)

Hans Gårdh, Vicar, [Värmdö Parish](#)

Linda Kumblad, Researcher, [Stockholm University](#)

Petra Lindwall, Development Manager, [Ett Hjärtligt Värmdö Foundation](#)

Kristina Lång, Municipal Commissioner, [Värmdö Municipality](#)

Niklas Nilsson, Project Manager, [Voice of the Ocean](#)

Martin Olgemar, Water and Wetlands Coordinator, [County Administrative Board of Stockholm](#)

Jan Olsén, Nature Warden (formerly Swedish Navy and County Administrative Board of Stockholm)

Viktor Sandberg, Youth Coordinator, [Sportfiskarna](#)

Pontus Tengby, Municipal Commissioner, [Värmdö Municipality](#)

Pella Thiel, Chair, [Swedish Society for Nature Conservation – Värmdö](#)

Anna Wallenberg, Landowner, Lemshaga and Beatelund (Värmdö)

Cecilia Wibjörn, Water Manager, [Archipelago Foundation](#)

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Club details at our website [varmdoskargard.se](http://varmdoskargard.se)

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## 8. Appendix: Interview guide

“We are conducting a survey for a possible Rotary project concerning the creation of wetlands in Värmdö. The purpose is to improve the environment, increase biodiversity, and contribute to sustainable water management. We would like to hear your experiences and views. Participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time.”

### Background and context

1. Can you briefly describe your role in the community (association, interest, profession, etc.)?
2. What is your relationship to nature or the environment in Värmdö?

### Perceptions of environment and natural values

3. What do you think is the best thing about the nature and environment in the area?
4. Is there any particular environmental issue that you experience as a problem here?

### Knowledge and attitude towards wetlands

5. What comes to mind when you hear the word “wetland”?
6. Do you know of any wetlands in the area? Have you visited any?

### Needs and priorities

7. What do you think the area would gain if more wetlands were created?
8. Are there any risks or disadvantages you see with such projects?

### Previous experiences

9. Do you know if any similar projects have been carried out here before? How did it go?
10. Have you yourself participated in any nature conservation or environmental efforts before?

### Values and anchoring

11. How do you think people in your network or organisation would respond to a wetland project?
12. Is there anything that could increase engagement in such issues?

### Conclusion

13. What do you think is most important to consider if one wants to create a project that will continue and have local anchoring?
14. Would you like to remain involved, for example in follow-up or idea development?