Saimaa ringed seal (Phoca hispida saimensis) is one of the most endangered species in the world. Global and local issues define conservation and management of living areas of Saimaa ringed seal. Implementation of sustainable development is based on international environmental politics. Municipalities' land-use decisions are often affected by the pressure to manage in the field of the global economy. Increasing the number of cottages and leisure time homes are seen in rural municipalities as one solution to survive in global economical challenge. Increased housing on inland lakeside areas will also increase man-made disturbance to the Saimaa ringed seal. Toxins in the water are not a problem anymore for Saimaa ringed seal after the turn to post-industrial society. Now the biggest threats for the seal are fishing tackles, which are distributed by people living in the cottages located on lakeside. Also other indirect disturbances caused by lakeside housing create serious problems.

The study area, Lake Pihlajavesi, is located in the middle part of the lake complex Saimaa. About 30 % of the population of the Saimaa ringed seals live here. Three municipalities, Savonlinna, Punkaharju and Sulkava, surround Lake Pihlajavesi. During the last 15 years these municipalities have completed five shoreline master plans in the Pihlajavesi area.

This research has studied what kind of a role Saimaa ringed seal plays in the field of local planning. To define planner’s chances to take seals into account, the possibilities given by legislation and the interpretations of the most important laws have been analysed. It has also been studied if Saimaa ringed seal has been accounted for in the master and strategic planning. The relations of seal lairing and man-made disturbances have been researched with the methods of GIS (Geographic Information System).

According to this study, the seal population in Lake Pihlajavesi is living closer to the man-made disturbances than the other populations elsewhere in Lake Saimaa. Housing situated near the most important lairing sites of Saimaa ringed seals in Lake Pihlajavesi will increase dramatically due to the shoreline master plans. Despite possibilities given by legislation, Saimaa ringed seal is not mentioned in municipal strategies. The communicative turn in planning has been carried out in Finland, for example, by the new Land Use And Building Act. New communicative elements give more chance to take Saimaa ringed seal into account in planning. There are possibilities to develop new ways of participation in open planning processes to gather more information about Saimaa ringed seal in these areas.