



Agenda item “Barents protected Area Network” at the 10th meeting of the Ministers of the Environment in the BEAC

The area of the Barents region is vast, 1 755 800 km², and equivalent to the combined surface of France, Spain, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands. The region include 13 administrative regions altogether with about 5,5 million inhabitants. All four countries are parties of Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

More than half of the world’s remaining large tracts of relatively unfragmented forests are boreal forests and the Barents region include some of these tracts. All administrative regions still have large areas of natural and intact forests and wetlands, some of them are included in the Natura 2000 or the Emerald network. This place the Barents region in stark contrast to the majority of Europe’s landscapes which has faced more habitat loss and fragmentation than any other continent. However the boreal-arctic nature is under increased pressure from land-use, exploitation and climate change. The Barents region with its huge forests and wetlands includes opportunities for adaptation and mitigation of climate change. In a short term perspective the orientation of land-use is critical for biodiversity. The impact of forestry, mining and new infrastructure often means habitat loss, fragmentation and negative impacts on wildlife. Also road nets limits the accessibility to important grazing habitats and potentially affect the indigenous people livelihood. The Global Biodiversity Outlook 3 indicates that the proportion of protected land area in the Barents region is relative low compared with other regions.

Protected areas are recognised as an effective and necessary means of conserving biodiversity in the Barents Region. The overarching aim of the Barents Protected Area Network (BPAN) is to promote and support a representative protected area network for conservation of biodiversity and boreal-arctic nature, especially forests and wetlands. The project uses the Programme of Work on Protected Areas as the framework in accordance with the recommendations from the UN and CBD. BPAN contributes to the EU initiative of green infrastructure, the Green belt of Fennoscandia and the overall implementation of The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. During 2011 the project has involved more than 40 experts in a joint Barents analyse using the CBD reporting framework for protected areas as a tool for the evaluation of the status. The working model also included GIS-analyses and regional workshops.

Some conclusions from the BPAN project are:

- There is comprehensive information and knowledge about the protected areas.
- The ecological gaps in the protected area system are quite well known.
- All regions are working on management plans for their protected areas.
- More work is needed to secure connectivity and representativity of the protected area network.
- There are many threats to the nature in the region such as mining and infrastructure.
- There is a need for better involvement of local and indigenous people.
- Financing needs for protection and protected areas are significant.

The preliminary BPAN results indicates that 12,5% of land area in the region is protected through different categories of protection. About 15% of the land area in the region will be protected when planned protected areas are consolidated. The project has found that there is a need to further assess the values, threats and opportunities of the protected areas and to upgrade their status. For example some areas need to be taken into consideration for a stronger protection. The results also indicates that more lowland areas and productive forests need to be protected. More analysis of the representativity in the protected area network is needed. Furthermore it is of outmost importance that connectivity between protected areas is preserved. Ways and means to facilitate the implementation of planned protected areas and site specific protection seems necessary to further explore.

The key messages from the BPAN are:

- The boreal-arctic nature in the Barents Region is unique and vulnerable and belongs to the largest remaining intact forest ecosystem on earth.
- BPAN contributes to the internationally agreed Biodiversity targets of CBD to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2020.
- There is a need to assess the values, threats and opportunities of the protected areas as part of the BPAN network and to upgrade their status.
- Protected area network is an important tool for adaptation and mitigation of climate change.
- Protected areas in the Barents Region should be a part of local economies and contribute to the culture and livelihood of the indigenous peoples and local communities.
- For biodiversity conservation it is of outmost importance that connectivity between protected areas is preserved.
- The boreal-arctic nature is under increased pressure from land-use, exploitation and climate change.

Questions for further discussion:

What are the main obstacles and solutions for promoting sustainable land-use in the Barents region?

How can habitat fragmentation and loss of habitats be reduced ?

What activities are taken in the administrative regions to establish planned protected areas?

How can the concept of green infrastructure and green belt be further developed in the Barents region?