



THE BARENTS WORKING GROUPS

ANNUAL REPORT

Name of the Working Group: **Working Group on Barents Forest Sector**

The current Chair and the Chairmanship period: **Chair 2019-2021 Norway – Anne G. Delphin, Ministry of Agriculture and Food.**

1. Priorities of the Chairmanship

- ✓ Focusing on the forest-based bioeconomy.
- ✓ Aim to identify potential challenges relating to the transition to a low-carbon society.
- ✓ Focus on knowledge by engaging the forestry sector and research organizations located in the Barents region.
- ✓ Strengthen regional cooperation, involve other working groups and the secretariats within Barents Euro-Arctic Cooperation.
- ✓ Encourage youth participation.

2. Meetings (meetings held, main topics and outcomes of the meetings)

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all meetings in 2021 were digital meetings, mostly on Teams platform.

First ordinary WGBFS meeting in 2021 was held on February 11th, 2021. The meeting was also the first meeting of the new chair of the WGBFS, Ms. Anne Gjerlaugsen Delphin. The meeting was the start of the preparations of the contributions from the working group to the [Action Plan on Climate Change for the Barents Region](#). Members discussed approaches and after the meeting the working group provided the first, preliminary input to the action plan.

Members of the working group were updated on the progress of two ongoing projects and reports: 1) Report on the Forests in the Northern Europe's Emerging Bioeconomy and 2) a pilot study on UNESCO Biosphere Reserves within the Barents Region and the possibilities for cooperation.

The working group discussed preparations for the upcoming Barents Forest Forum at each ordinary meeting throughout 2021.

Second ordinary WGBFS meeting in May 2021 covered a presentation by Research Professor Juha Alto from the Finnish Meteorological Institute on [Forest Fires in Fennoscandia under changing climate and forest cover \(IBA ForestFires\)](#). The project synthesizes the current knowledge on the occurrence, monitoring, modelling and extinction on forest fires. Furthermore, the project cover forest fires as a source of black carbon.

Furthermore, the second meeting was an exchange on developments in the forest sector and related policies in the WGBFS member countries. A lot of information on topics ranging from policy discussions, market developments and research and development activities was shared in the meeting.

The working group elaborated on action points for the Action Plan on Climate Change for the Barents Cooperation and submitted the result (second submission) to IBS after the meeting.

Hanna Haapala, Chair of Working Group on Environment participated in WGBFS third meeting in September 2021. She presented the plans and status for the project on “Forest biodiversity protection in the Barents region – paving the way for mainstreaming biodiversity into forestry”. WGBFS appreciated the presentation and the suggestion to develop relevant cooperation between Working Group on Environment and Working Group on Barents Forest Sector on the topic, and notably on arranging a webinar. The webinar was conducted on December 9th, 2021.

By the third WGBFS meeting, the working group finalized its comments on the Action Plan on Climate Change for the Barents Cooperation.

Furthermore, the working group was updated on the preparations on the upcoming International Junior Forest Contest organized by the Federal Forest Agency, Russian Federation in December 2021.

3. Other activities (projects, events, programmes etc.)

At the Barents Forest Forum in Umeå in 2019, WGBFS initiated work on a report on [The Forest in Northern Europe’s Emerging Bioeconomy](#). The report describes the role of the forest in bioeconomy transformation and green innovation in the northern part of Europe — Finland, Norway, and Sweden — and highlighted the challenges facing forests in this emerging bioeconomy. These countries are also part of the Barents area, thus the northern part of Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Russia. In summary, the report discusses several common features and lessons learned from these countries. The report was published in January 2021. Camilla Widmark, Associate Professor at SLU, and Coordinator of Forest Bioeconomy Network – an EFI research network, was the editor of the report. A working group consisting of experts from Finland, Norway and Sweden developed the report. The report was basis for a session of the first day of Barents Forest Forum 2021.

WGBFS initiated a [Pilot study of UNESCO Biosphere Reserves within the Barents Region and the possibilities for collaboration](#). The aim was to analyze the possibilities to use the Barents Cooperation as a potential platform to establish collaboration between Biosphere Reserve areas within the Barents region. UNESCO Biosphere Reserves are model areas for sustainable development, where new methods are tested and developed. Furthermore, we were interested in investigating how to use Biosphere Reserves as platforms to implement Barents Cooperation's activities, strengthen cooperation between the different Barents Cooperation working groups and highlight forest and forestry in the natural resource sector. One of the main findings of the Pilot project is that the Biosphere Reserves in the Barents Region can be core areas for implementing objectives and goals of the Barents Programme and the different BEAC Working Groups' activities, strengthen cooperation between the different BEAC Working Groups, and enhance the interregional cooperation within the Barents Region.

Anders Esselin, Man & Nature, and Johanna MacTaggart, national coordinator for the Swedish MAB program, developed the pilot study. WGBFS is very grateful for their work and effort.

WGBFS organized the Barents Forest Forum 2021 on the 20th and the 21st of October 2021. Barents Forest Forum was a digital event on the zoom platform. The first day of the forum focused on forests in a circular economy in the Barents region. The second day was devoted to climate change, forest disturbances and adaptation strategies. Several interesting presentations from the member countries contributed to an useful event for the participants. Programme and recordings from the Barents Forest Forum are available at the [event site](#).

Chair of WGBFS, Anne Delphin, presented the activities of the working group during [the 18th Ministerial Meeting on the Barents Euro-Arctic Council](#) in Tromsø on the 26th October 2021.

4. Results of the year (decisions, new initiatives, improvements)

2021 was the first year as a working group for WGBFS after change of status from a subgroup to a full working group approved by CSO September 22, 2020.

Main result of the year was the report on report on The Forest in Northern Europe's Emerging Bioeconomy and outcomes of the pilot project on Biosphere Reserves in the Barents region and the possibilities for collaboration.

The outcome of Barents Forest Forum 2021 was also a major achievement in 2021. The working group managed to build on the initiatives from previous forums, notably on outcomes for the forum in Umeå in 2019 and to bring representatives from all member countries to an active participation in the Barents Forest Forum 2021.

5. Youth involvement (how has the working group included young people or worked with youth issues during the year)

During the Barents Forest Forum 2021, WGBFS organized a panel debate on how the younger generation view the future of the forest and bioeconomy. The debate was based on a [report](#)

[from a workshop](#) conducted prior to the previous forum in Umeå in 2019. The report is provided by Camilla Widmark, SLU/ Forest Bioeconomy Network – an EFI research network.

6. Evaluation of the work (What went well, what needs improvement)

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to prohibit physical meetings during 2021. For the first time even Barents Forest Forum was a digital event. Despite these obstacles, the work of WGBFS progressed satisfactory.

7. Other

Minutes and presentations from all meetings - and records from Barents Forest Forum, can be accessed from [WGBFS website](#).

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