

## **Minutes from the BFSN virtual meeting 1.4.2020**

Chair invited participants for a round of introduction:

Participants;

### ***Sweden:***

Lars Andersson

Camilla Widmark

Jonas Rönnerberg

### ***Finland***

Pasi Poikonen

### ***Russian Federation***

Maria Sokolenko

Natalia Demidova

### ***Norway***

Helge Molvig

Terje Hoel

Knut Øistad

### ***International Barents Secretariat***

Roman Gokkoev

Roy Hojem

Chair of the BFSN, Terje Hoel opened the meeting and welcomed participants. The meeting started with remembrance of Esbjörn Andersson. Esbjörn Andersson was involved in cooperation within the Barents cooperation for many years. Esbjörn passed away in 2019.

## **1. Recent development in the forest sector in the Barents region.**

### **Sweden:**

- ***Climate Adaptation***

- Through a new regulation, the Swedish Forest Agency has been given an increased responsibility to work for forestry to adapt to climate change. The forests of the future will

be able to withstand damage and meet other problems and opportunities that result from the changed conditions.

- ***Increased sustainable forest production***

- Conducted the 88 measures, growth can eventually increase by 20 percent, corresponding to approximately 20 million cubic meters with a value of nearly 25 billion annually, according to the group's assessment. At the same time, this means tens of millions of tonnes of less carbon dioxide per year.

- ***Seminars will develop the forest program***

- Multi-use - how can we increase the use of the same forest for several businesses?
- How can active sustainable forestry contribute to a good and secure supply of biomass in the bioeconomy of the future?
- How do we achieve the environmental goals while safeguarding and strengthening ownership and user rights?
- What is meant by a sustainable forestry policy and how are the equality goals of production and the environment achieved?

- ***Government forest investigation***

- At the end of 2019, the forest investigation commissioned documentation from the Swedish Forest Agency and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency. The inquiry asked questions about key biotopes, mountainous forests, knowledge bases and responsibilities and the representative of forest types in protected forest and voluntary provisions.

*The commission's mission is to find solutions for strengthened ownership, flexible forms of protection and conservation in the forest. The commission is conducting its work until July 1, 2020, when a report is to be submitted to the government.*

- ***Forest damage***

- In 2020, the Swedish Forest Agency received extra funding from the government to reduce forest damage, especially with regard to spruce bark beetle. Reducing the attacks and damage of this pest is a very prioritized task within the Swedish Forest Agency and work is ongoing on several fronts, both in processes and in various projects.

- ***The spruce bark beetle project - stop the bark beetles***

- Stop the bark beetles is a collaborative project between authorities, companies and organizations in southern and central Sweden. The goal is to limit the attacks and damage of spruce bark as far as possible through collaboration and increased activity in the forest.

The project is led by the Swedish Forest Agency, which cooperates with some 20 other authorities, companies and organizations.

## **Russian Federation**

The 'Conservation of Forest' (Сохранение лесов) federal project is being implemented following the Presidential Decree 204 of May 7, 2018 «On National goals and Strategic objectives of development of the Russian Federation to 2024». The project activities are planned for 2018-2024. The priorities of the project are forest restoration; forest protection against forest fires; forest protection against pests and diseases.

In 2019, about 9.6 billion rubles was allocated for the project work (over 112 million euro). The area of forest restoration last year exceeded 1 million hectares. Regional firefighting units received additional 12 thousand items of equipment for fire monitoring and fighting. Regional machinery was supplemented by more items of forestry machines and equipment.

In the Arkhangelsk region, for example, almost 110 million rubles (1.28 million euro) was allocated to perform activities under the 'Conservation of Forests' Project. Similar to the federal level, it helped to equip better the forestry and firefighting units.

The area of forest restoration in the region was 79 thousand hectares in 2019. 95 % of forests felled was restored.

The work at both federal and regional levels is going on in 2020.

We are keeping the annual tradition of inviting people to take part in tree-planting campaigns. For instance, in 2019 about 6 million volunteers took part in tree-planting campaigns held around Russia. In 2020, the spring tree-planting had been dedicated to the 75th anniversary of the end of the II World War. But due to the coronacrisis, it may be decided to prolong the campaign to autumn to allow more opportunities for people to join.

Another important issue of the national forestry-related work nowadays is the improvement of the Forest code of the Russian Federation. The relevant decision was made by the RF Government in 2019. Now there is an inter-agency Working group who are working on the new Forest Code edition together with academia, non-profit organisations and businesses.

## **Finland**

### ***Actual Issues***

Seasonal Working Force (Labor); private forest owners are living **far away** from their forest estates and the silvicultural works are more and more outsourced, the average age of the forest owners is **62** years.

### ***Korona Effect***

**Korona** Influences on the Forest Sector minor than to the other Sectors (short time production breaks due to pandemia and seasonal weather restrictions)

### ***Policy Development Review***

**Forest Law** in force **2014**, more independent **decision making** for the forest owners, Continuous Forest Cover approach is possible, but it has not received much supporting initiatives. Forest Ownership Structures has been developed towards the **common management** of the larger forest areas. The paragraph nr **10** of the Forest Law protects certain specific nature areas inside the economic forests, where the commercial forestry is the main target.

Finnish Government supports the on time forestry field works (silviculture/160 € - 230 €/ha, first thinnings/harvesting of the small-sized roundwood, forest roads/30%-60% the share of the subsidies), the support program is generally defined for five years period

### ***Investments to Forest Sector***

Bioproduct Mills -> **Pulp Mills** (Bio-oil/pyrolysis), Oulu Pulp Mill Improvement (1.9 million m<sup>3</sup> -> 2.4 million m<sup>3</sup> roundwood annually) and paper machine conversion to container board production **Kemi** (Lapland) Pulp Mill (**Polar King** project; waiting for YVA autumn 2020; 7.6 million m<sup>3</sup> roundwood annually), **Lieksa** (North Karelia) **Pyrolysis** Plant construction started (Nordic Green Fuel Oy) as well as **Haapavesi** Bioetanol Plant in the Northern Ostrobothnia (Nord Fuel) is waiting for investment decision, projects in Kemijärvi (Lapland) (Boreal Bioref) and Paltamo (Kainuu) (KaiCell Fibers) are approaching the implementation stage, Finnpulp project in Kuopio was dropped out in winter 2020 (EU directive Weser does not allow the project due to the environmental risks)

### **Norway**

The corona situation has the highest priority on all levels. Norway has taken very strong measures strongly affecting industries across sectors.

Agriculture and food security is the most at alert, although minor problems at the moment. Many processes **are** taking place on market and farmer level.

Forest activities was initially not severely affected by the pandemic, and was before the current situation in a very good position - harvest level at all-time high.

The most obvious challenge is the urgent need **of** foreign workers for silvicultural activities in the months to come (same challenge as labour intensive work in agriculture, horticulture).

Our Agricultural Agency has been given the task to reallocate subsidies for planting to stimulate a new domestic workforce for planting and to ensure the economic situation for nurseries having 30 million seedlings in stock.

It is also considered regulations to open and prolong residence for foreign workers (if they can enter!), incl. the possibility to do forest work during the first two weeks quarantine.

A major slowdown in the building sector is however creating a domino effect, already large challenges for the sawmill industry and reductions in the downstream supply chain are emerging.

General powerful economic actions such as liquidity loans, tax postponement, to all companies/entrepreneurs is the main action and covering forest and wood industry.

Because of the sudden and high unemployment rate, projects are considered forwarded within infrastructure and the building sector, that might help the situation in the forest and wood sector, directly or indirectly.

Regular work will continue such as a special dialogue forum between government and business is established. Norway is also alerted to bark beetle attacks and suitable weather conditions. Improved preparedness plans are under development.

## **2. Activities and recent developments in the forest sector in Northern Norway (Kystskogbruket) and plans for a possible forest sector meeting in 2021 (Helge Molvig, County Governor's Office Troms and Finnmark)**

Helge Molvig presented activities and recent developments in the forest sector in Northern Norway (Nordland, Troms og Finnmark). Please find attached his presentation.

Some key points are:

- Main species are birch, spruce and pine
- Overall: 50% forest
- Small scale forestry and small businesses
- Annual growth: 2000 000 m<sup>3</sup>  
Annual cutting: 235 000 m<sup>3</sup> (12%)
- Areas are of major importance for reindeer husbandry
- About 50 % public owned forest in the north

The project "Kystskogbruket" aiming at

- Collaboration forestry – industry – authorities
- The main goal is to quadruple economic growth in the sector by 2040.
- Project seek to facilitate more use of forest resources

Helge informed the network on the plans for a forest sector event in Northern Norway in 2021 and suggested the cooperation with BFSN (Barents Forest Forum) for this event. (See also agenda item 4).

### **3. Barents Cooperation in 2020 – 2021. Status and planned activities (Roman Gokkoev, International Barents Secretariat)**

The Norwegian BEAC Chairmanship has the following priorities for 2019-2021:

- Health (the First Ministerial Meeting on Health was held in November 2019, which will be followed up by Expert Group Meeting on eHealth in Autumn 2020)
- People-to-people contact (the emphasis is given to Youth engagement in all sectors of Barents cooperation, several workshop were held jointly by JWGY and BRYC)
- Knowledge (Norway will seek to develop research cooperation by engaging with relevant organization and with the forestry sector at the regional level)

The Västerbotten BRC Chairmanship will conduct several thematic events during 2019-2021:

- Seminars on Predators (March 2019 in Svanselse and March 2020 in Arkhangelsk)
- Seminar on Children's Sports and Health in Joensuu in June (postponed)
- Seminars and workshops on Gender Equality and Telemedicine (TBA)
- In 2021 a Barents Forum will be held to enhance cooperation between WGs (WG Chairs will be invited)
- The Regional Committee meeting will be held online in June

Several WG meetings have been schedule for Spring 2020, most of them will be replaced by online meetings and held before Summer Break (WGE SHE, WGE, BEATA, JWGC, JWGH, WGEC, JCRC, JWGT). Finland is holding the Chairmanship in WGE for 2020-2022 and will organize an online meeting in June. Otherwise most of the WGs are chaired by Norway.

BRYC is planning to have their Annual Meeting in Arkhangelsk in September (tentatively).

Norway will host in Autumn 2021 several high-level events concluding their Chairmanship (among others 18<sup>th</sup> BEAC Ministerial, 3<sup>rd</sup> Indigenous Peoples Summit).

More information about upcoming events will be published on [www.barentscooperation.org](http://www.barentscooperation.org)

### **4. Roadmap - plans and programs for the BFSN 2020-2021. Initial ideas for Barents Forest Forum in 2021.**

The draft roadmap was distributed prior to the meeting together with the invitation. BFSN secretariat introduced the preliminary roadmap.

The roadmap indicates possibilities for cooperation with WG Environment if the fall meeting will be conducted in Tromsø, as also is the plan for WGE. Russian Federation asked about the rationale behind that preliminary initiative of cooperating with WG Environment in the autumn meeting in Tromsø. The Russian Federation highlighted the importance to

encourage relevant cooperation with all WG. This should be highlighted in the next version of the roadmap.

Finland emphasised the importance of cooperation with other networks and organisation, such as EFI Bioeconomy network, SNS and others. This should be highlighted in the roadmap

Members of the network are encouraged to provide input and comments to the BFSN Secretariat to the draft roadmap during April 2020 and a new and revised version will be distributed after that. The roadmap is heavily influenced by the actions taken in member countries on the mitigation of the COVID-19 pandemic. It will be updated accordingly.

Based on the reactions from the members of the network, the BFSN secretariat will facilitate a cooperation with the forest sector in Northern Norway with an ambition to join forces for a joint event in 2021 (Barents Forest Forum/Regional forest conference). More information will follow during the planning process.

#### **5. Evaluation of the role of BFSN in BEAC.**

Terje made an introduction to the agenda item:

BFSN is a sub-group of the Working Group on Economic Cooperation, but have for several years acted as an independent group and reported directly to the CSO. Based on informal discussions between some countries at the Barents Forest Forum in Umeå last year, initiate an open discussion on the role of BFSN in BEAC and if internally preferred by the network members consider an application to the CSO to change status to a working group or similar

There are currently 3 options:

1. Keep the current arrangement
2. Change status to a "Working Group" (WG)
  - Organisational change. Possible, but not mandatory, to change the name
3. Change status to a "Joint Working Group" (JWG)
  - Change the category of group with BEAC.

Initial views by BFSN members:

Sweden: Would like to step up and become a separate WG.

Finland: Need an Evaluation. Investigate possibilities for funding projects.

Russian Federation: Would like to learn about the specifics of the WG and JWG modes of work, as well as to get the information on how the possible change of the status would influence the membership, status of the BFSN decisions, financial implications, cooperation with senior BEAC bodies (e.g. reporting), etc.

Norway: Are seeing opportunities for better recognition of work related to forestry within BEAC. Cannot at the moment see any major challenges to become a separate WG and are open for further discussions.

Members of the network agreed to request the BFSN Secretariat to prepare a brief assessment of the different alternatives.

## **6. AOB. UNESCO Biosphere reserves.**

Sweden (Lars) highlighted the possibility to cooperate with relevant UNESCO Biosphere reserves in the Barents region.

Look into the possibilities for cooperation between Biosphere reserves in the Barents region. What are they working with? Could be as platform for cooperation between BFSN or WG and candidates to increase cooperation

Sweden (Lars) will provide the BFSN members with a note on the topic for consideration at a later stage.

Participants expressed gratitude to Norway for perfect organisation of the online BFSN meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 12.30

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