

Pilot study of UNESCO Biosphere Reserves within the Barents Region and the possibilities for collaboration

Aim of the study

The aim of this pilot study has been to analyze the possibilities to:

- Establish collaboration between Biosphere Reserves within the Barents Region - Strengthen the regional cooperation within the Barents Cooperation.
- Use Biosphere Reserves as platforms to implement BEAC Working Groups activities, strengthen cooperation between the different BEAC Working Groups, and highlight forest and forestry in the natural resource sector.

Six UNESCO Biosphere Reserves are described

Vindelälven-Juhtatahka in Sweden, North Karelia in Finland, and Laplandskiy, Kenozerskiy, Vodlozersky and Metsola in Russia.

- Biosphere Reserves are model areas for sustainable development, where new methods are tested and developed.
- Engagement in local, regional, national and international cooperation, is essential.

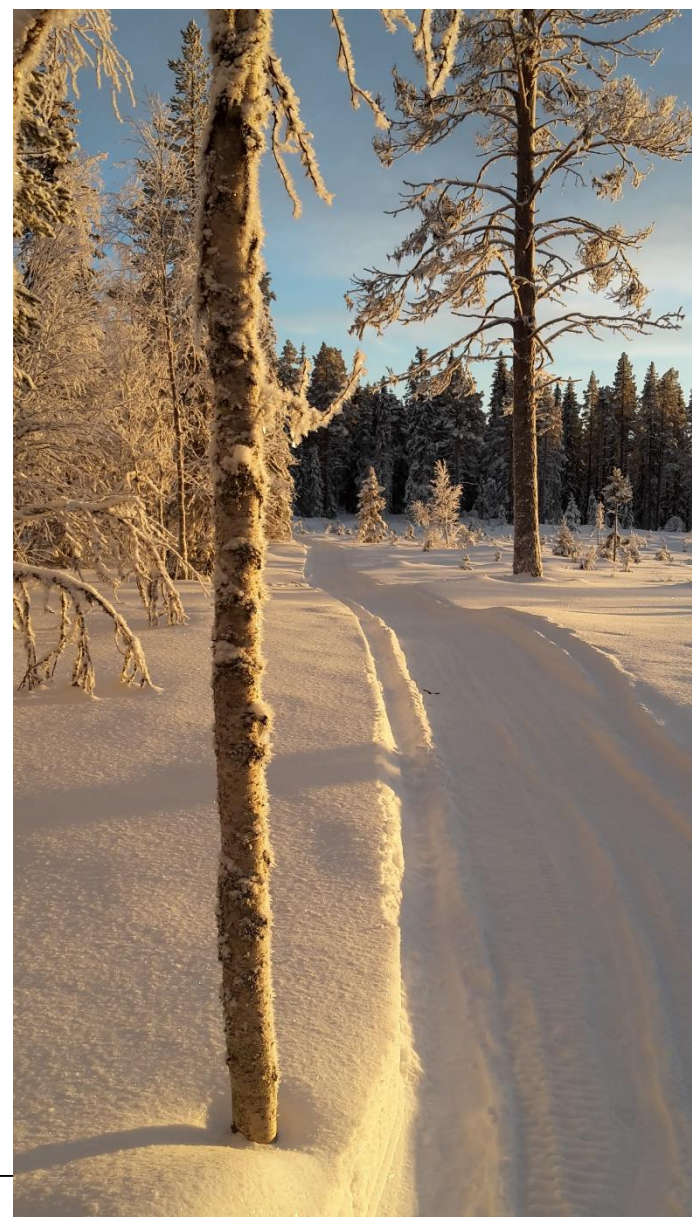


Shared conditions

- Designated under UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme to promote sustainable development based on local community efforts and sound science.
- Model areas for sustainable development, where new methods are tested and developed.
- Devoted to coordination of activities and different actors, collaboration, communication, and they seek to inspire and engage.

Shared conditions

- Gifted with Arctic climate, vast natural resources and recognized for their globally unique natural environments, magnificent landscapes and cultural heritage.
- Facing problems with the consequences of ongoing climate change.
- Struggling with the challenges such as remoteness, long distances, sparse population, urbanization, increasingly ageing populations and the younger population leaving for larger cities in the south.



Differences

- In Sweden and Finland, the administrations of the Biosphere Reserves do not constitute an authority.
- In Russia, the administrations of the Biosphere Reserves are the same as for National Parks and Nature Reserves.
- Number of employees: while Vindelalven-Juhtatahka and North Karelia Biosphere Reserves have 1–3 employees, the Russian Biosphere Reserves have between 25 (Metsola) and 165 (Kenozerskiy) employees.
- Spatial differences: The core areas and buffer zones constitute a much larger part of the Russian Biosphere Reserves.
- Ownership of the land. In Vindelalven-Juhtatahka and North Karelia Biosphere Reserve, approximately 50% of the land is owned by private landowners. In the Russian Biosphere Reserves most land is owned by the State.

Biosphere Reserves share several priorities and focus areas:

- Sustainable (nature) tourism, including management of growing visitor numbers
- Climate change, including mitigation and adaptation
- Youth exchange and cooperation, including the use of digital tools and social media
- Multiple use of forests, including food from forests (berries, mushrooms, meat from game and reindeer, fish etc.)
- Research and environmental monitoring, including exchange and cooperation between universities
- Sustainable development of local communities, including pro-biodiversity SME business development
- Exchange and cooperation between indigenous people
- Environmental protection, outreach and education, including research schools for young people

Examples of priorities that align with the Barents cooperation

- Youth exchange and cooperation
- Climate change
- Sustainable development of local communities with emphasis on an active and goaloriented management of natural resources
- Development that takes into consideration interests of the indigenous peoples
- Research
- Cultural creativity and innovation for the wellbeing of people and economic development

Conclusion

- This pilot study clearly shows that many ideas, ambitions, goals and activities are congruent between the BEAC Working Group on Barents Forest Sector (WGBFS), and the Biosphere Reserves in the Barents Region.
- The Biosphere Reserves can be core areas for implementing objectives and goals of the Barents Programme.

