

RESOLUTION

ON THE EIGHTH MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONTACT FORUM ON HABITAT CONSERVATION IN THE BARENTS REGION (HCF VIII)

The eighth Meeting of the International Contact Forum on Habitat Conservation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region, further HCF VIII, was organized on the 29th of September – 2nd of October, 2015, in Petrozavodsk, Republic of Karelia, Russia.

HCF VIII, organized under the Chairmanship of Russia (2014-2015), was held according to the recommendations of previous forum meetings: Trondheim 1999, Petrozavodsk 2001, Kuhmo 2003, Syktyvkar 2005, Umeå 2008, Arkhangelsk 2010 and Bodø 2013. HCF activities are a part of the activities of the Nature Protection Subgroup of the Working Group of Environment of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region, under the Russian Chairmanship (2014-2015).

The HCF VIII, gathering in total 100 participants, including representatives of ministries of environment and other national and regional authorities, institutions, scientific and other organizations from Finland, Norway, Russian Federation and Sweden and presented expert reviews and discussed the following topics:

1. STATUS OF THE HABITAT CONSERVATION IN THE BARENTS REGION

The status of habitat conservation differs between and within countries and regions. Positive development can be observed in all the entities of the Barents Region. HCF VIII emphasizes the importance of national implementation of the CBD Strategic Plan 2011-2020 and the Aichi targets, aimed at reaching the overall goal of halting the loss of biodiversity. The HCF VIII expresses the great concern to the continuous threats towards existing and planned protected areas in the BEAR.

The following topics were discussed:

- Green Belt of Fennoscandia, past and present
- Trilateral cooperation in Lapland
- Protected Area networks in Republic of Karelia and Murmansk oblast, present status, awaited additions, shortcomings in the structure and function
- Databases from nature chronicles in zapovedniks and zakazniks

2. CONSERVATION OF BOREAL FORESTS IN THE BARENTS REGION

A draft strategy for Protection of Intact Forest in the Barents Region was presented and discussed. It was developed by nature protection subgroup of the BEAC working group of environment. Its main goal is to protect the intact forest landscapes and tracts and by that contribute reaching the goals of CBD. An example of regional strategy and action plan work to protect intact forest was presented by the "Silver Taiga" Foundation from the Komi Republic.

3. PROTECTION OF WETLANDS AND COASTAL AREAS (Implementation of the Ramsar Convention in BEAR).

There is a need to strengthen the implementation of the Ramsar Convention, particularly by identifying new Ramsar sites in the BEAR, including transboundary Ramsar sites, using existing structures and programs, i.e.

Green Belt of Fennoscandia. The HCF VIII agreed that relevant recommendation from Ramsar COP 12 (Uruguay, 2015) should be implemented in the BEAR.

The new Strategic Plan of the Ramsar Convention for 2016-2024 is based on notion, that Inland and coastal wetland ecosystems were being lost at a rate faster than that of any other ecosystem (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005) and recent trends in global wetland area, with a loss of 64% to 71% of wetlands since 1900 (Nick Davidson, 2014). The vision for the 4th Strategic Plan is "Wetlands are conserved, wisely used, restored and their benefits are recognized and valued by all".

The strategy is formed from four goals, which are

- 1: Addressing the drivers of wetland loss and degradation;
- 2: Effectively conserving and managing the Ramsar Site Network;
- 3: Wisely using all wetlands and operational goal
- 4: Enhancing implementation. Each goal includes more precise targets to specify outcome expected by 2024.

The strategy emphasizes the need to integrate strategy and its goals and targets into national biodiversity strategies and action plans as well as to other sector's policies. It also calls for enhancing the regional cooperation Nordic Baltic Wetland Initiative (NorBalWet), better management of Ramsar Site Network and improving the representativeness of the network especially designating new transboundary wetlands.

4. THE FUTURE OF BIODIVERSITY IN THE BARENTS REGION. RED DATA BOOKS – future steps.

The resolution of the Seminar on Red Data Books, held in 29th of September to 4th of October 2014 in Syktyvkar, Komi Republic, is reassured by HCF VIII. The next seminar on Red Data Book is planned in Perm (October 27-28, 2015). The HCF VIII also agreed to look further into the results from the up-coming Conference in Perm.

5. BARENTS PROTECTED AREAS NETWORK – BPAN results and the lessons learned

The BPAN project has resulted in establishing new protected areas and the outcomes were communicated throughout the Barents Region. The first phase of the BPAN project was finalized. The publications in English and Russian are ready. The exhibition is successfully demonstrated in Oulu, Syktyvkar, Ukhta, Helsinki and Fell Lapland and Pallastunturi visitor centres. Pilot projects were implemented in Karelia, Republic of Komi, Arkhangelsk and NAO.

The second phase of the project will be concentrated on coastal areas. Key experts should be invited on marine issues. The workshop on coastal areas will take place 1-2 December in Murmansk, WWF-Russia will be responsible for it.

Another important activity within BPAN II phase is intact forests. It was suggested that WWF Russia will implement this work. In the project will participate Finland, Russia and Sweden. The field expedition to the intact forest area under the leadership of Silver Taiga foundation will be held in 2016 (Udora region of the Komi Republic).

6. THE GREEN BELT OF FENNOSCANDIA

The joint vision and priorities for 2016-2020 for the GBF were described during the Enhancement of GBF project (2013-2014). The vision is a joint messages of the long-term aims of GBF:

The Green Belt of Fennoscandia is a widely acknowledged transboundary model area for biodiversity conservation, social well-being, and environmentally sustainable economic growth generated by the region's unique biological and geological diversity and cultural heritage.

The developmental work of the GBF will be carried out under six components with the following goals:

1: Biodiversity Protection

Development of a network of protected areas and ecological connections within the three countries to ensure conservation of biodiversity, as well as sufficient north-south and east-west connectivity for migration

2: Research

Intensified trilateral research cooperation on biodiversity conservation, climate change, culture and social well-being in the GBF

3: Economic and regional development Strengthened sustainable economic and regional development based on human capacity building and ecosystem services in the GBF area

4: Social and cultural development

Strengthened livelihoods based on the nature values and cultural heritage of the GBF area

5: Institutional development

Intensified cross-border cooperation within the GBF network

6: Communication, Education, Participation and Awareness

High level of awareness of the GBF's unique biological and geological diversity and their conservation among all stakeholders. Specific indicators with targets for year 2020 are given in the strategy.

NEXT HCF

In accordance with the rotation principle, next meeting, HCF IX, will be held in Finland in 2017. The place and the exact dates will be decided later by Finland.

Participants of the HCF VIII expressed their gratitude to Karelian Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Protected Areas Directorate of Karelia and Ministry of Nature Use and Environment of the Republic of Karelia, hosting and organizing the meeting.

Petrozavodsk, Republic of Karelia, Russia, 2nd of October, 2015.

On behalf of Finland

Tapio Lindholm

On behalf of Norway

Helen Johanne Andersen

On behalf of the Russian Federation

Maria Dronova

On behalf of Sweden

Mats-Rune Bergström