



## **A common approach to strengthen environmental considerations in forestry co-operation in the Barents Region**

This document suggests principles and means for development of a common approach for the Working Group on Environment (WGE) and the Working Group for Economic Co-operation (WGEC) Forest Sector Task Force (FSTF) of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC), in order to strengthen environmental considerations in forestry.

### **Increasing focus on forest resources in northern Europe**

The forests in northern Europe have immense global importance because of their broad expanse, their biodiversity, their role in the carbon cycle in the process of sequestration, and their actual and potential influence on international trade in forest products. The forest sector has to further develop a modern approach for creating ethical codes of conduct which take into account the needs and values of various stakeholders on the basis of sustainable forestry and related activities.

Russian boreal forests constitute about 60 percent of the world's total boreal forest area which is why Russian policies concerning forestry and nature conservation are important for the future of the whole northern coniferous zone.

The boreal forest zone - taiga and sub-taiga - cover over 80 percent of the territory of Northwest Russia. From an ecological point of view, a very important feature is the large proportion of old-growth forests, forests without any significant human impact. The unfragmented forests in their natural state have unique characteristics and represent a high degree of biodiversity, which is endangered or lost in the forests under intensive commercial use.

In Northwest Russia, in spite of intensive exploitation of forests in parts of the territory, the remaining old-growth forests still constitute the greater part of old-growth forests existing in the boreal forest zone in Europe. This is due to vast territory, inaccessibility of forests in large areas, and conscious forest policies. The countries in the Barents Region can provide Europe with unique forest resources respecting the four dimensions of sustainable forestry.

When assessing the ecological importance of the forests in Russia, attention must be paid, in addition to biodiversity, to the forests' role in the global carbon balance and carbon cycle. The Russian forests provide the largest land-based carbon storage in the world and account for an estimated 75 percent of net boreal carbon storage capacity.

Sustainable forestry in the Barents Region should meet four criteria: cultural, ecological, economic, and social. The present situation, especially in Northwest Russia, offers good opportunities but, at the same time, the scene is ambiguous.

The area covered by the primary forests is prone to be reduced as a result of industrial harvesting. The irrational use of forests is a problem in those areas where reforestation measures and control over the use of forests are weak. In a number of areas, forestry is increasingly facing conflicts with other forms of land-use, not sufficiently planned to support sustainability. A lot of international attention is attached to the recent restructuring of the Russian forest and environmental administrations, having a great responsibility in implementing the present and future policies in their respective fields in a rapidly changing situation.

The forest resources in Northwest Russia have an important role for the economy in the Barents Region, as in Russia as a whole. Northwest Russia is the main area in production and exports of forest products, since the big forest industry plants are located there. Accordingly, the utilization of forests is a central issue for the economic and social conditions in the Region.

### **Co-operation in nature protection**

Nature conservation in Russia is based on a long tradition. The first nature conservation area was established in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Russian system of nature conservation areas is unique and it is one of the oldest protected area systems in the world. Russia has accumulated vast knowledge on protected areas development.

The geographical connection and similarity between natural conditions in Finland, Sweden, and Norway and Northwest Russia provide a sound basis for both economic and scientific co-operation in the sphere of nature conservation.

Some of the objectives identified in the Nordic-Russian biodiversity co-operation are,

firstly, to support the development of a network of protected areas.

secondly, to promote scientific co-operation and inventories of forests and landscape values, as well as to develop means to assess the status of the conservation areas network. Gap-analysis methods, for example, can be used to provide information on protection needs,

thirdly, to promote conservation of biological diversity in connection to forestry practises and forests under economic exploitation, for example, by promoting the development of landscape ecological planning, and

fourthly, to promote also a wider international dialogue on the needs and possibilities of conserving the forest and mire ecosystems in Northwest Russia. It also aims at promoting better mutual understanding of the basic concepts and objectives of nature protection.

### **Towards a multi-partner approach**

The direction of international co-operation in forestry and biodiversity in northern Europe will be towards a strengthened multi-partner approach. One of the agreed objectives is to increase co-operation between the European Union and the Russian Federation. The second Action Plan for the Northern Dimension (2004-2006), under preparation, envisages an enhanced and intensified participation of the EU in the Barents Region. Environment and sustainable use of natural resources are some of the key sectors in the Action Plan. The WGEC FSTF will continue its forestry co-operation also under the second Northern Dimension Action Plan. Biodiversity co-operation takes place mainly in the Habitat Contact Forum (see below).

In addition to the BEAC, the Arctic Council, particularly the CAFF-programme (Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna) is very relevant to international co-operation, as is the involvement by the UNDP. The International Financial Institutions play an increasingly important role, especially the World Bank, the EBRD, and the Nordic Financial Institutions. Good co-ordination is a prerequisite for effective international participation.

In the future, interactions affecting the forest sector in Russia will be increasingly based on the private sector. It will be a great challenge for the Russian public institutions to provide sufficient normative guidance and control in order to enable the private sector to function, whilst, at the same time, promoting sustainable forestry development.

### **Integration of ecological and economic objectives**

There are a number of reasons to focus more in depth on possibilities to seek mutual benefits between economic and environmental objectives. The environmental credibility of the producers influences the consumption patterns more and more at the international market, not least in the forestry sector. The consumers request that the environmental aspects be taken into consideration during the whole production cycle, starting from forest to the final product.

The existence of internationally credible nature conservation areas' network and environmentally sound forestry practices in Northwest Russia are prerequisites for the functioning trade, as well as international financing and investments in forest industries.

In general terms, there are good opportunities to combine cultural, economic, social and ecological strategies in the forestry sector in the Barents Region. Forests represent a voluminous strategic resource, which can be used as a tool for local and regional authorities in providing employment and income. Benefits should be sought from diversification of the economy by raising the degree of local processing of raw materials, as well as development of different kinds of other activities related to forestry.

Possibilities of nature protection in promoting socio-economic development should be used whenever feasible, for example by creating infrastructure for ecological tourism. In addition to the forests and biodiversity, the Barents Region is rich in traditional sites and landscapes of immense historical and cultural significance, which supports the development of tourism and other sources of livelihood for people.

### **Concrete means and fora for co-operation**

At the WGE meeting in Umeå on 4-5 March 2002 it was decided that a common approach to strengthen environment considerations in forestry should be developed jointly by the Working Group on Environment (WGE) and the WGE Forest Sector Task Force (FSTF). It is emphasised the common approach should be based on the Malawi Principles for ecosystem approach from 1998 (see <http://www.biodiv.org/doc/meetings/cop/cop-04/information/cop-04-inf-09-en.pdf>, p. 7-10).

The following four parts in further developing the approach are suggested:

#### 1. Development of a mutual perspective on environmental issues in Barents forests

WGE and FSTF should together, and preferably also by expert interaction, discuss and develop a mutual view on how environmental issues should be dealt with in forests, specifically boreal forests in the Barents Region. The two groups have to, as a starting point, acknowledge the different conditions concerning forest and forestry, socio-economy, etc. in the Barents Region.

On that common basis, and on existing, scientifically and practically accepted management models, theoretical concepts for environmental, economical, cultural and social responsible forest management for different parts of the Barents Region should be described in general terms. (Note that local stakeholders are important when defining sustainable forestry in specific areas.)

It is important that management concepts take both the production forests used for wood harvesting and protected forests into account. It is generally accepted that these two types of forests complement each other when managing forests sustainable from a diversified biological point of view.

#### 2. Model Forests as a practical tool for co-operation

A suitable arena for developing a common sustainable approach in forest management is the planned model forests network in the Barents Region. The basic idea with model forests is to illustrate a balanced development of the cultural, ecological, economical and social aspects of sustainable forestry in an area (the model forest), based on conditions and needs of the inhabitants of a particular region. A new network based on partnerships within and between the various model forests in the Barents Region will provide excellent opportunities for human resources and institutional capacity building in the Region. In model forest areas, gaps and problems regarding sustainable forest management are identified, and improved management practices will be developed and implemented. Among other aspects of sustainable forestry, this concerns biological diversity in many ways:

- biological diversity as an integrated element in sustainable forest management
- protection of forests
- carbon trade and bioenergy production and use
- non-wood products
- services: eco-tourism, recreation, cultural heritage as related to forest, forestry and forest utilisation

Co-operation between the WGE and the WGE FSTF is valuable also for the development process of model forests in the Barents Region. The FSTF has started a processes for establishing model forests in two oblasts in Russia (Archangelsk and Murmansk) and in Västerbotten, Sweden. WGE should be invited to participate in this process. The first field tour to Archangelsk and Murmansk was carried out in June 2003.

Joint actions between the WGE and the WGEC FSTF will offer great opportunities in the European scale and perspective. Forested areas of Europe are losing from the efficiency of rural development. Due to limited working opportunities, the forested areas are losing inhabitants, especially young and educated people. These desperate developments lead to an unbalanced demographic situation and even vital sectors of the regional and local economy will have difficulties in attracting young and motivated people for employment.

In addition to traditional timber production many new areas of forest utilisation like protection of biodiversity and landscapes or eco-tourism and carbon sequestration have been introduced during recent decades and years. They could provide new opportunities if strong and efficient RTD support would be available from the public as well as from the private sector. The four main elements (ecological, economical, social and cultural) of sustainable forest management have gained great sympathy in public opinion but so far the opportunities to combine these as an effective entity for development have been minimal.

The close integration of the Nordic and Russian forest sector will provide new opportunities in the European contribution to global forest sector development. The model forest concept provides an internationally accepted tool for the development of sustainable forestry. The principle behind the program is simple: Demonstrate how partners, representing a diversity of forest values, can work together to achieve sustainable forest management using innovative, region-specific approaches.

### 3. Nature protection

International Contact Forum on Habitat Conservation Issues in the Barents Region, established in 1999, (Habitat Contact Forum, HCF) provides an open forum for authorities, specialists, NGOs, and indigenous peoples' institutions to integrate and co-ordinate biodiversity conservation issues and projects in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Northwest Russia. The existing HCF co-operation, added with the participation of other Barents Region actors, can therefore form one active arena for a common BEAC approach on strengthened environmental considerations in forestry.

An operational and clearly structured protected areas network in the Barents Region and especially in Northwest Russia would contribute to better functionality, efficiency and reliability of forest management and forest industry. There is good basis to include the HCF project proposal "GAP-Analysis in Northwest Russia" in this work. A comprehensive assessment of the representativeness and gaps of the protected areas network will combine biological research to the structural and economic assessment of the protected areas, from ecological, recreational, and eco-tourism point of views. The results of the project will serve as tools for sustainable use of land and natural resources.

### 4. Co-ordination with the Barents Regional Council

Finally, it is emphasised that interaction between the BEAC and the Barents Regional Council should be undertaken on regular basis regarding forestry and biodiversity conservation in the development of strengthened environment considerations in forestry.

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This document has been prepared jointly by the WGE and the WGEC FSTF for the BEAC Environment Ministers' meeting in Luleå on 28 August 2003.

