



**Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC)
Working Group on Environment (WGE)
Finnish Chairmanship 2012-2013**

Work Programme Nature Protection Subgroup (NPS)

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Nature Protection Subgroup (NPS) of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council's (BEAC) Working Group on Environment (WGE) coordinates and implements co-operation on biodiversity and habitat conservation in the Barents Region. The Nature Protection Subgroup continues the work of the International Contact Forum on Habitat Conservation in the Barents Region (HCF) established in 1999.

The Work Programme guides the Nature Protection Subgroup's efforts in halting the loss and maintaining biodiversity, and protecting valuable habitats in the Barents Region during the Finnish chairmanship of the Working Group on Environment during 2012-2013.

2. BACKGROUND

BIODIVERSITY AND NATURE PROTECTION IN THE BARENTS REGION

The Barents Region represents some of the last unbroken wilderness areas in the Earth. The last remaining intact old-growth forests are also located in northern Europe, mainly in the Russian parts of the Barents Region.

In the northern part of the Region the ecosystems are relatively pristine but vulnerable. The Barents Region is recognised as an increasingly important part of the global natural heritage requiring protection and sustainable management.

Threats to the remaining wilderness areas continue to grow due to increasing and often unsustainable use of natural resources such as gas, oil, minerals and forests, aquatic and other living resources. Biodiversity loss and habitat fragmentation remain the biggest threat to the biodiversity of the Barents Region.

The level of protection of both terrestrial and marine territories varies considerably between the 13 subregions of the Barents Region. There are considerable gaps in the network of protected areas that need to be filled to safeguard biodiversity. Challenges are also recognised in the management of protected areas in all the four countries.

Biodiversity is also threatened by human-induced climate change. However, sustainable nature management and biodiversity conservation can result in reducing the impacts of climate change on both people and nature in the Region.

Several protected areas have been established along national borders within the Barents Region. Also, wildlife management and protection of migratory species require co-operation between the countries. Co-operation and exchange of experience are regarded as both a challenge and an opportunity.

HISTORY

Finland, Sweden and Norway have been co-operating bilaterally with Russia in the field of biodiversity and habitat conservation for more than 20 years. For instance, Finland and Russia have built a transboundary network of protected areas around the concept of the Green Belt of Fennoscandia. Another substantial result is the establishment of a trilateral conservation area in Inari-Pasvik between Finland, Norway and Russia.

In 1999 the International Contact Forum on Habitat Conservation in the Barents Region (HCF) was established to further promote co-operation and coordination between Russia and the Nordic countries. The HCF presents a platform for discussing nature conservation and related cultural and socio-economical issues. The HCF network has proved valuable in dealing with nature conservation issues ranging from small-scale problems to wide-ranging international issues.

The designation of the Nature Protection Subgroup (NPS) under the BEAC Working Group on Environment (WGE) and the integration of the HCF into the Nature Protection Subgroup contribute to reaching national and international goals in biodiversity conservation in the Barents Region.

3. MANDATE AND DECLARATION

The Subgroup on Nature Protection has a mandate from the Barents Environmental Ministers to work with projects that include biodiversity conservation, ecosystem approach, protected areas, conservation of natural and cultural heritage sites, co-operation with the Working Group on Economic Co-operation's Task Force on sustainable forestry, as well as projects on mitigation and adaptation to climate change, including absorption and deposition of greenhouse gases by natural ecosystems.

The Umeå Declaration (9th November 2011) states the following:

The Environment Ministers

21. *reaffirmed* the commitments made under the meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity in Nagoya 2010 and acknowledged the importance of activities under the Barents environmental cooperation in meeting relevant targets under the Convention,
22. *underlined* the importance of identifying and establishing a representative and appropriately managed network of protected areas in the Barents Region (BPAN), *welcomed* the preliminary results from and continuation of the BPAN project and noted the need for more effective ways and means for promoting preservation of natural habitats in the Barents region,
23. *noted* that climate change is a stressor to regional biodiversity and therefore acknowledged the preliminary results and *welcomed the* continuation of the joint project of the Nordic Council of Ministers and BEAC on the effects of climate change on biodiversity and ecosystems goods and services in the Barents region,
24. *underlined* the need to both protect and secure the last remaining pristine forests in the Barents Region,
25. *noted with recognition* the outcome of the Sixth Habitat Contact Forum held in Archangelsk June, 2010, *looked forward to* the next meeting of the forum, to be held in Norway in 2012, which will focus on protection and management of marine and coastal habitats, boreal forests and wetlands,
26. *stressed* the importance of further development of the Green Belt of Fennoscandia-network of existing and planned protected areas from the Gulf of Finland to the Barents Sea, supporting ecologically, economically, socially and culturally sustainable transboundary co-operation between Russia, Norway and Finland,
27. *acknowledged* the long lasting and successful trilateral cooperation in Pasvik-Inari area and further *support* the implementation of the action plan for Pasvik-Inari Trilateral Park,
28. *acknowledged* the results of the project Integrated Ecosystem Management Approach to Conserve Biodiversity and Minimise Habitat Fragmentation (ECORA) and called for the dissemination of results in the Barents region,
29. *welcomed* the exploration of the trilateral co-operation on nature protection and ecotourism in the Treriksröset area,
30. *welcomed* the recommendations from the Conference on wetlands and flyways in the Barents region and the Green Belt of Fennoscandia, held in Murmansk in September 2011, and *looked forward to* the follow up on the results from the conference.

4. GOAL AND INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK

GOAL

The overall goal is to strengthen co-operation and coordination in biodiversity and habitat conservation with the aim of halting the loss of biodiversity in the Barents Region for the future, bearing in mind the aspects of climate change.

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK

The Nature Protection Subgroup (NPS) aims at contributing to the fulfilling of the obligations of national strategies and international agreements on biodiversity and habitat conservation; such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD; 1993), the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (1971), the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS; 1979), the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern; 1979), the UNESCO World Heritage Convention (1972) and the IUCN's Programme on Protected Areas; as well as recommendations of the Nordic Council and the Arctic Council, in particular the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna Programme (CAFF).

The four countries of the Barents Region have committed to halting the loss of biological diversity within the CBD Aichi Biodiversity Targets by 2020. Establishment of protected areas is an essential tool for conserving biodiversity.

5. WORK PROGRAMME AND SCHEDULE

The Work Programme describes ongoing projects fulfilling the strategic directions outlined above. Projects and activities in the Work Programme will be addressed as time, resources and opportunity permit.

The aim of The Nature Protection Subgroup (NPS) during the Finnish Chairmanship will be to implement a smooth operation of the subgroups work. Face to face meetings of NPS will be held preferable in connection with other relevant events and meetings. The first meeting of NPS will be back-to-back with the meeting of Working Group on Environment on 6-7 February 2011 in Helsinki. The NPS will then work during 2012-2013 until next ministerial meeting.

NPS PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

The main activities and projects within the Nature Protection Subgroup are listed and shortly described below. Details about the projects are described in the attached factsheets.

- 1) The 7th International Contact Forum Meeting on Habitat Conservation (HCF VII) in the Barents Region
 - Early 2013 in Nordland county, Norway, coordinated by Norway, multilateral
- 2) Promoting a representative and effectively managed Barents Protected Area Network (BPAN)
 - 2011-2013, coordinated by Finland, multilateral
- 3) Developing the Green Belt of Fennoscandia
 - 2012, the first meeting of the expert working group to be organized by Finland, trilateral
- 4) Conservation of the last pristine forests in the Barents Region
 - 2012, coordinated by Norway, multilateral
- 5) Effects of climate change on biodiversity and ecosystem services in Barents Region
 - 2011-2013, coordinated by Sweden, executed by Umeå University, multilateral
- 6) Follow up of the project "GAP analysis in NW Russia" – analysis of the representativeness of the protected area network
 - 2012, coordinated by Finland, bilateral
- 7) Wetlands – conservation and ecosystem services
 - 2012-2013, coordinated by Norway, multilateral
- 8) Network of Botanical Gardens in the Barents Region
 - 2012-2013, preparation coordinated by Oulu University, multilateral
- 9) Treriksgränset (ecotourism and protected areas)
 - feasibility study in 2011, project phase in preparation, coordinated by Finland, trilateral

- 1) The 7th International Contact Forum Meeting on Habitat Conservation in the Barents Region (HCF VII)

AIM FOR 2012-2013:

The Nature Protection Subgroup (NPS) will contribute in the dissemination of the recommendations from the 6th Habitat Contact Forum meeting (HCF VI) arranged in Arkhangelsk June 2010.

NPS has initiated and will be the main contributor to the planning process of the 7th Habitat Contact Forum, which will be organized in Nordland County, Norway in early 2013.

The 7th forum meeting will focus on the following topics:

- Protection and management of marine and coastal habitats
- Further efforts to protect boreal forests in the Barents Region
- Further development of the BPAN
- Follow-up on selected recommendations from CBD COP 10
- Synergies of protection of forests and wetlands with climate change mitigation and adaptation

BACKGROUND:

The International Contact Forum on Habitat Conservation (HCF) is a platform for co-operation on habitat conservation issues in the Barents Region including the adjacent marine territories. The Forum focuses on management of existing protected areas, establishment of new protected areas, and other habitat items as appropriate.

The responsibility for organizing the HCF meetings rotates between the countries or subregions of the Barents Region. Preferably biannual meetings are organized with the participation of local and indigenous people, NGO's, scientific institutes and federal and regional authorities of the Barents countries. The results of the meetings are provided to federal and regional authorities responsible for habitat conservation in the Barents Region, organizations of indigenous people, non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations and other relevant parties. HCF biannual meetings will be co-funded by the four Barents countries.

2) Promoting a representative and effectively managed Barents Protected Area Network (BPAN)

AIM FOR 2012-2013:

The aim of the BPAN project is to promote and support a representative protected area network for conservation of biodiversity and boreal-arctic nature in the Barents Region, especially forests and wetlands. The project will analyze and evaluate the protected area network, publish recommendations of its further development and communicate the results for the decision makers, authorities and general public. The multilateral project covers all 13 regions of the Barents Region and participating members represent the authorities, researchers and NGOs. BPAN project is multilateral with all the countries present in the Steering Committee and Expert Working Group.

The Nature Protection Subgroup (NPS) is actively contributing to the promoting and developing a representative protected area network in the Barents Region through implementation of the BPAN project.

BACKGROUND:

The meeting of the Barents Environment ministers underlined the need to establish a representative and well managed network of protected areas in the Barents Region (BPAN) in their meeting in February 2010 in Tromsø, Norway. The BPAN contributes to the CBD Aichi Biodiversity Targets by promoting the development of a representative and effectively managed protected area network in the Barents Region. BPAN project is funded by Nordic Council of Ministers with national self-funding by Finland, Sweden, Norway and WWF Russia Barents Office.

3) Developing the Green Belt of Fennoscandia (GBF)

AIM FOR 2012-2013:

The Nature Protection Subgroup (NPS) will contribute to the development of Green Belt of Fennoscandia. NPS will consider how Sweden eventually could be involved in the GBF co-operation. The trilateral Steering Committee and the Expert Working Group will be nominated and start to act in 2012. The first trilateral GBF Expert Working Group meeting will be organized in 2012 in Finland. NPS will especially contribute to the follow up on concrete projects identified and prioritized by this working group.

BACKGROUND:

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to develop the GBF was signed 17th February 2010 by the Ministries of Finland, Norway and Russia. The memorandum facilitates the ecologically, economically, socially and culturally sustainable transboundary cooperation along the Finnish-Norwegian, Finnish-Russian and Norwegian-Russian parts of the GBF. The Green Belt of Fennoscandia includes existing protected areas of different status and enables the inclusion of planned protected areas when established. The MoU is valid for up to ten years.

4) Conservation of the last pristine forests in the BEAR

AIM FOR 2012-2013:

The NPS will execute a collection and compilation of all available material from the many international scientific expeditions to old-growth forests in NW Russia, especially in Arkhangelsk Region, through the years 1997 – 2011. An assessment of the results gained from these expeditions will be conducted. Based on the results and with the help of external experts an evaluation seminar will be convened in the second half of 2012. The recommendation from this seminar will direct the further work on this important task.

BACKGROUND:

In the period 1997 -2011 several international expeditions were organised to evaluate and confirm the biodiversity value of pristine boreal forests in NW Russia with the aim to propose designation of protected areas. NPS will support in applying the national funding.

5) Effects of climate change on biodiversity and ecosystem services in Barents Region

AIM FOR 2012-2013:

The objective of the project is to assess the effect of predicted increases in anthropogenic pressures and land-use changes on future species communities in the Barents Region.

BACKGROUND:

Umeå University is running the project, which is funded by Nordic Council of Ministers and by Sweden, Norway and Finland.

6) Follow up of the project GAP analysis in Northwest Russia – analysis of the representativeness and gaps of the protected area network

AIM FOR 2012-2013:

Finland will edit and publish the English Edition of the publication "GAP analysis in Northwest Russia". The English version will enable to disseminate results for wider audience in the Barents co-operation. The project results and recommendations will be discussed by NPS and presented in other Barents Region meetings.

BACKGROUND:

The bilateral GAP analysis in Northwest Russia project was implemented in 2007-2011. The aim was to analyze the representativeness and gaps of the protected areas network and give recommendations for its development. The project was coordinated by Finnish Environment Institute and implemented by authorities, researches and NGOs of Murmansk, Arkhangelsk, Vologda and Leningrad Regions, Republic of Karelia and the City of St.Petersburg with the support by Finnish experts. The final publication was published in 2011 in Russian. Publishing the English Edition of the publication will be funded by Finland.

7)

Wetlands – conservation and ecosystem services

AIM FOR 2012-2013:

To further cooperate on the implementation of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in the Barents Region, the NPS in cooperation with Pasvik zapovednik (Strict Nature Reserve) will oversee the compilation of proceedings from the International Conference on Wetland and Flyways in the Barents Region, held in Murmansk September 13 -15, 2011, and contribute in the dissemination of the recommendations from this conference.

The NPS will collect and provide good examples on values from wetlands in the BEAR to the Ramsar Convention driven initiative to develop a TEEB report (The Economy of Ecosystems and Biodiversity), on Water and Wetlands to be launched at the Rio+20 in June 2012.

NPS will continue its cooperation with the Nordic-Baltic Wetland Initiative (NorBalWet), regional initiative under the Ramsar Convention, by for example coordinating relevant activities.

BACKGROUND:

All Barents countries are signatory parts to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. A main pillar of the Convention is international cooperation on wetland issues, including topics like transboundary wetlands, shared water catchments, shared species, and development projects that may affect wetlands. NPS will support in applying the national funding.

8) Network of Botanical Gardens in Barents Region

AIM FOR 2012-2013:

The aim is to develop the Network of Botanical Gardens and to enhance their cooperation in research, education, exchange of information and to raise awareness to meet the targets of Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

BACKGROUND:

The botanical garden of Komi Republic organized a first meeting for the botanical gardens in Barents Region for networking and preparation of the further cooperation in 2011. University of Oulu has prepared application for ENPI (The European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument) funding to further continue the cooperation.

9) Treriksgränset

AIM FOR 2012-2013:

The aim is to continue the trilateral cooperation in Treriksgränset area according to the recommendations of the feasibility study implemented in 2011.

BACKGROUND:

Feasibility study of Treriksgränset was implemented in 2011 with the Interreg funding. The project was coordinated by Metsähallitus Natural Heritage Services (Finland) with the participation of Norwegian and Swedish partners. The project phase is under preparation.

6. MEMBERS AND SUPPLEMENTARY REPRESENTATIVES

The following persons are **the members** of the Nature Protection Subgroup.

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APPENDICES

REPORT 2010-2011
The NPS PROJECT LIST (revised in November 2011)
Fact sheets of priority projects