

Nature Conservation in Europe: Approaches and Lessons

Annex FI.1. Regional Nature Conservation Cooperation

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Finland has been active in regional nature conservation cooperation through the development of an international protected areas network with Russia, the Nordic countries and the Baltic States. Cooperation between Finland and the Soviet Union (later the Russian Federation) dates back to the 1970s.

The first tangible result of cooperation was the establishment, in 1989, of the Friendship Park on both sides of the Finnish-Russian border. The Friendship Park constitutes five separate areas in Kuhmo (Finland), and the large National Park of Kostamus in Russia. Later the cooperation led to the establishment of the Vodlozero National Park in 1991. Vodlozero was Europe's most extensive (about 5 000 km²) forest and mire National Park, located in wilderness between the White Sea and the Lake Vodlozero in the regions of Karelia and Arkhangelsk.

The most important part of the cooperation, however, has been support for the Fennoscandian Green Belt. The Green Belt incorporates the current and planned protected areas on both sides of the Finnish-Russian border. Field inventories have indicated that the areas along the border are very important for the whole of northern Europe in terms of ecosystems and biota within the boreal forest (taiga) zone. The Green Belt stretches more than 1 300 km from the Baltic Sea to River Paatsjoki in northern Lapland. When completed, the Fennoscandian Green Belt may be the single most important interface for nature conservation between the EU and Russia.

The practical objective is to establish a chain of Finnish-Russian cross-border twin parks along the Green Belt zone. In northernmost Lapland along the Green Belt zone trilateral cooperation between Finland, Norway and Russia has already resulted in three very close protected areas. In the late 2010s the Fennoscandian Green Belt advanced with some significant protected areas, such as the Ladoga National Park, which covers the northern shores and archipelago of Lake Ladoga, the largest lake in Europe.

Until the end of the 1990s Finland, Sweden and Norway each had their own bilateral cooperation projects with Russia. Since then bilateral cooperation has been reformed to multilateral projects implemented by all four countries under the umbrella term 'Barents region cooperation'. Activities during the 2010s included a gap analysis in the protected area network of north-west Russia, and establishment of new protected areas (see Kobayakov and Jakovlev, 2013; Kuhmonen *et al.*, 2017).

References

- Kobayakov, K. & Jakovlev, J. (eds.) (2013) *Atlas of high conservation value areas, and analysis of gaps and representativeness of the protected area network in northwest Russia: Arkhangelsk, Vologda, Leningrad, and Murmansk Regions, Republic of Karelia, and city of St. Petersburg*. Helsinki: Finnish Environment Institute.
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