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Developing sustainable forest management in North-West Russia: experiences from three implementation projects

- The Russian Federation is part of the Montreal process supporting the development of sustainable forest management (SFM).
- The SFM concept encompasses ecological, economic and socio-cultural dimensions, all of which should be balanced and meet agreed standards.
- We compare implementation concepts aiming at sustainable landscapes, such as Model Forest and Biosphere Reserve, with regular approaches for forest landscape management.
- Since the mid 1990's several international and national SFM implementation projects have been initiated in the Russian Federation.
- Our case studies in the North-West Russian Federation are Komi Model Forest in the Komi Republic, Pskov Model Forest in the Pskov region and Kovdozersky Model Forest in the Murmansk region.
- Learning from practical experiences supports the production of applied knowledge needed to implement sustainable forest landscape policies.



Photos: Marine Elbakidze and Per Angelstam

Since the mid 1990's, several development projects on Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) were implemented in the Russian Federation. These provide important lessons about how ecological, economic and socio-cultural values can be maintained, developed and balanced. These projects show that the profiles of forest products based on natural resources vary among regions, and thus that there are several possible roads to SFM.

Russia's forest landscapes

In NW Russia there are many types of forest ecosystems, from tundra in the north to deciduous forest in the south. There are also forest landscapes in different phases of development. These range from so far inaccessible large intact forest areas, to areas subject to exploitation only after the Second World War, and to forests with long management history.

Three large projects aimed at implementing SFM in NW Russia are a good illustration of this.

1. The Komi Model Forest (MF) has a relatively short history of forest use. There are pristine forests, which should be maintained to some extent, and productive forests used by many actors and stakeholders.
2. The Kovdozersky MF occupies forest landscapes which were intensively logged during the Soviet time. The forests are now young and inaccessible.
3. The Pskov MF has forest landscapes with a long economic history. At present the forest industry is becoming regionally important as the region is close to the western market.

Komi Model Forest

The goal of the project was to implement SFM in the Komi Republic, and to disseminate new experiences in NW Russia. The project began in 1996 and was finished in 2006. The source of funding was the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. WWF and "Silver Taiga", a Komi Regional Non-Profit Foundation, were the implementing organizations. Since 2007 "Silver Taiga" continues the work and raises funds.

Place

The Komi MF is located in the Komi Republic's SW, and occupies around 800,000 ha. Around 20 logging companies operate in the MF area. The Priluzje Leskhoz (PL; a forest management unit) was chosen as the MF area for several reasons.

1. The area has pristine forests, where conflicts between conservation and management need to be solved.
2. The history of forest use reflects diverse aspects of environmental history in the Komi Republic.
3. The forest landscape represents the boreal zone in European Russia.
4. Forestry plays an important role in the regional and local economies.
5. The local population represents different ethnic and social groups.

Partnership

The main partners of the Komi MF are the State Agency of Forestry of the Komi Republic, the PL, the Northern State Forest Inventory and Planning Enterprise, the SmartWood-Nepcon FSC certification audit company, the Institute of Social-Economic and Energy problems of the North, and the Syktyvkar Forest Institute.

Main outcomes

Inventory and ecological evaluation of pristine forests in the PL was carried out. The approach has been used to support decision-making for conservation and development.

The whole Komi MF area and chain of custody of three logging companies was certified according to the FSC system.

A public hearings procedure in forest management was developed and used as a basis for the official "Recommendations on Public Hearings". This is now applied throughout the Komi Republic.

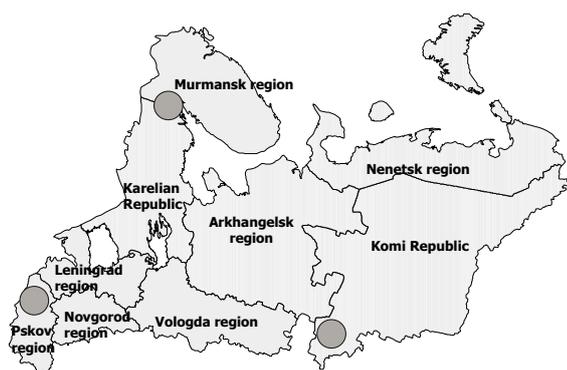
Extension courses for forest managers are carried out regularly.

Kovdozersky Model Forest

The creation of the Kovdozersky MF was initiated in 2004 by the Barents Euro-Arctic Council Working Group. In 2006 the MF project got financial support from the Regional government of the Murmansk Oblast and the EU Tacis Programme "Baltic Forest" project. The main goal of the MF is to promote and support forest-based sustainable development in NW Russia.

Place

The Kovdozersky MF is located in the southern part of the Murmansk Oblast. It covers the area of the Kovdozersky les-khoz. The area is about 400,000 ha. Forests are dominated by Scots pine. Forestry was the main industry during the Soviet period. The harvesting activity was very intensive, and annual allowable cuts were often exceeded. As a consequence young and middle-aged forests dominate in the area today. Presently the leskhoz does not have funding for all needed silvicultural activities. There are four small



Location of three Model Forests in NW Russia.



Photo: Nikolaj Neifeld

Pristine forests in the Komi Republic, NW Russia.

logging companies which have leased forest areas. There is a desire to develop the utilization of bio-energy from the forests.

Partnership

Around 30 organizations have expressed their interest to be a partner of the Kovdozersky MF. These represent the main sectors of the local economy, local organizations and government units in the area. The MF became a member of the Russian Model Forest Network in 2006.

Main outcomes

The development of the Kovdozersky MF is in an early stage. The positive trend includes developing cooperation with existing MFs in Russia.

Pskov Model Forest

The project was established in 2000 with the aim to implement an economically viable approach to SFM appropriate to production forests in NW Russia. The project was initiated by the WWF, and funded by the Swedish International Development Agency, WWF-Germany and StoraEnso.

Place

The Pskov MF area is located in the Strugo-Krasnensky Leskhoz in the Pskov Oblast, and occupies an area of about 46,000 ha. Forests belong to the southern taiga sub-zone. Intensive forest logging and a lack of silvicultural activities during the 20th century led to alteration of forest age and tree species structure. Young and

middle-aged stands now dominate, and there is a prevalence of deciduous trees (birch and aspen) over coniferous (pine and spruce) in the forest regeneration. The area of the Pskov MF is a leasehold territory of STF-Strug Company (a daughter company of StoraEnso).

Partnership

The main partners of the Pskov MF project are:

1. Ministry of Natural Resources of the Russian Federation.
2. Administrations of the Pskov Oblast and the Strugo-Krasnensky District.
3. Forestry Agency for Pskov Oblast.
4. Northwest Forest Inventory Enterprise.
5. St. Petersburg Forestry Research Institute.

Main outcomes

A new model for more intensive and sustainable forest management was developed and tested in the leasehold area.

In 2003, the STF-Strug company received an FSC certificate for 18,400 hectares of the MF area.

To ensure more intensive and sustainable forestry new guidelines for forest planning, forest management and forest use were elaborated, and implemented on the certified area.

A number of mechanisms and procedures to involve the community in forestry decision making have been tested. These are now tested also in other areas.

Conclusions

Our research on these three implementation projects provide knowledge on how to:

1. communicate existing experiences among forest actors, stakeholders and regions.
2. bridge cultural barriers by efficient communication and information exchange.
3. implement SFM and its dimensions in different regions to satisfy societal needs of forest goods, services and values.
4. develop approaches that strengthen local communities and improve the governance process regarding the management of natural resources at local and regional levels.

The Model Forest concept, as used in Russia, is an example of a “soft law”, thus providing an official mandate to support SFM innovations. There are several reasons for the need to implement this concept in Russia.

First there are many rules and regulations in the frame of the existing forest legislation which are not adapted to the regional economic, biophysical, socio-cultural and ecological conditions.

Second, there is a top-down governance system in the forest sector with gaps between needs and interests of forest stakeholders on the local level, and decision-makers of the top level.



Partnership work in the Pskov Model Forest.

Photos: Marianne Elbakidze and Per Angelstam



The hydropower industry is one of the main actors in the forest landscapes of the Kovdozersky MF.

The Russian Federal Agency of Forestry (RFAF) is supporting the idea to develop MFs in Russia. The RFAF has commissioned a two-year initiative to develop options and recommendations for creating a Russian National Model Forest Network. This could ultimately comprise as many as 31 sites that represent the main forest landscape types in the Russian Federation. Such a network would be not only examples of regionally adapted approaches to SFM but also arenas for the protection of rights, needs, values and interests of local and regional partners.

Keywords

Model Forest, North West Russia, sustainable forest management

Read more

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A main target group for implementation projects on sustainable development is children. Kovdozersky village. Photo: Per Angelstam.

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