

Protected areas and high conservation value forests in the Barents Region: Sweden, Finland and Russia

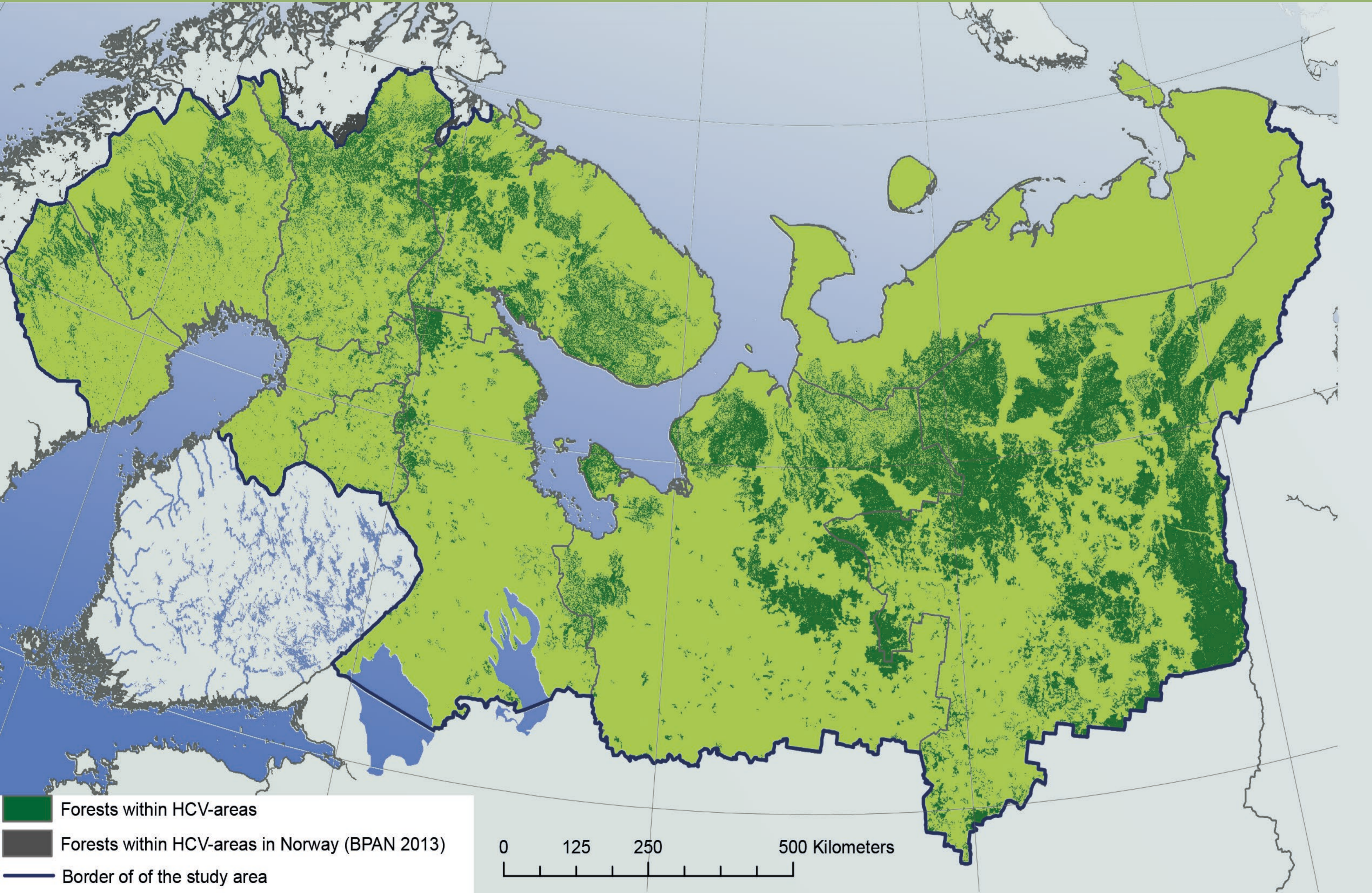
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The protection of terrestrial ecosystems in the Barents Region should continue and focus on areas with high biodiversity values.

High conservation value forests (HCVFs) in the Barents Region should be preserved.

The ecological connectivity of boreal forests in the Barents Region should be increased.



The Barents Protected Area Network (BPAN)

The second phase of the Barents Protected Area Network (BPAN) quantified and described protected areas and high conservation value forests (HCVFs) in the Barents Region. The project was an initiative of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council's Working Group on Environment and its Subgroup on Nature Protection, conducted by national and regional nature protection authorities, research institutions and NGOs from Sweden, Finland and Russia. It covered the Barents regions in these countries, with the exception of North Karelia in Finland and the Russian archipelagos of Novaya Zemlya and Franz Josef Land.

Between 2015 and 2017 the project produced updated information on progress towards the Aichi Biodiversity Targets 5 and 11 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The main focus was on forests, which cover about 60% of the study area. The results can be used in nature protection planning and sustainable management of forest resources in the Barents Region.

There is a need to safeguard valuable forest areas

The project produced new knowledge on the amount of protected forests in the study area. By the end of 2015, close to 12% of the forests in the study area were included in protected areas.

The concept of high conservation value forests (HCVFs) was used to identify forests that are particularly valuable for biodiversity. Field data, national forest inventories, remote sensing data as well as aerial images provided information about the distribution and characteristics of these forests. The data was analysed and presented in a comprehensive set of maps, using GIS. According to the updated information about the distribution and protection status of HCVFs, many valuable forests remain unprotected. This information can be used to further develop the protected area network in the Barents Region. Overall, it is important to have updated information about high conservation value forests to increase the ecological connectivity of boreal forests in the Barents Region.

The project formulated expert conclusions regarding the future development of the protected area network as well as preservation of HCVFs, based on statistical information and analyses carried out between 2015 and 2017. A comprehensive set of maps, tables and statistical data can be found in the final report of the project (Kuhmonen et al. 2017).

EXPERT CONCLUSIONS

I. Protection of terrestrial ecosystems in the Barents Region

- There is a need to establish more conservation areas in the Barents Region
- The establishment of protected areas should continue in the Barents Region in line with long-term national and regional conservation plans.
 - More work is needed to protect areas with the greatest biodiversity benefits in order to fulfil the Aichi Target 11 by 2020.
 - In order to preserve the full range of biodiversity in the Barents Region, there is a need to apply the ecosystem approach, and to promote access to open data on protected areas and valuable ecosystems.
 - Furthermore, the protected area systems should be developed at different geographical scales, from global and ecoregional to regional and local levels.

II. Mapping of forests with high conservation values (HCVFs) in the Barents Region

- High conservation value forests should be integrated into conservation planning
- High conservation value forests (HCVFs) that are included in existing and planned protected areas should be guaranteed strong protection.
 - HCVFs and especially HCVFs that are located in well-connected landscape matrixes should be given high priority when deciding which areas should be included in protected areas.
 - HCVFs that for various reasons are not given priority for inclusion in protected areas should be managed in a way that contributes to biodiversity conservation in the forest landscape as a whole, using other effective area-based conservation measures.
 - The Strategy for Protection of Intact Forests in the Barents Region (2015) should be finalised and implemented.

III. Enhancing connectivity of boreal forests in the Barents Region

- Strong connectivity between protected areas is crucial for maintaining biodiversity and sustaining ecosystem services
- Connectivity should be increased in particular between the more isolated protected areas in the southern and middle boreal zones.
 - Adaptation to climate change needs more attention. The boreal forests of the Scandinavian Mountains and the Ural Mountains still host well-connected HCVFs that provide possible dispersal corridors for species towards north and to higher altitudes.
 - Guidelines for identifying well-connected forest areas and tools for implementing measures to ensure better connectivity should be further developed and applied in practice.
 - Co-operation between different stakeholders should be established and further developed in order to combine biodiversity conservation and other use of forest areas such as forestry operations and development of infrastructure.
 - A comprehensive assessment of the connectivity of forested areas in the Barents Region is needed, including further descriptions of the natural features and land use of each region.

Main report of Bpan phase II

Kuhmonen, A., Mikkola, J., Storränk, B. & Lindholm, T. (eds.) 2017: Protected areas and high conservation value forests in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region - Sweden, Finland and Russia. – Reports of the Finnish environment institute 33/2017. 1-164.

Suominen, M. & Storränk, B. 2018: Protected areas and high conservation value forests in the Barents Region: Sweden, Finland and Russia. - Bpan results in brief. 4 pp.

Main reports of Bpan phase I

Lindholm, T., Jakovlev, J. & Kravchenko, A. (eds.) 2014. Biogeography. Landscapes, ecosystems and species of Zaoneshye Peninsula, in Lake Onega, Russian Karelia. - Reports of the Finnish environment institute 40/2014: 1- 360.

Juvonen, S-K; & Kuhmonen, A. (eds.) 2013 Evaluation of the Protected Area Network in the Barents Region. Using the Programme of Work on Protected Areas of the Convention on Biological Diversity as a Tool. - Reports of the Finnish Environment Institute 37/2013: 1-309.

Aksenov, D.; Kuhmonen, A.; Mikkola, J.; & Sobolev, N. 2015 The Characteristics and Representativeness of the Protected Area Network in the Barents Region. - Reports of the Finnish Environment Institute 29/2014: 1-189.

Kuhmonen, A., Aksenov, D., Dobrynin, D., Fossum, K., Höjer, O., Jonsson, B-G., Juvonen, S-K., Khrystaleva, J., Lindholm, T., Maksimov, D., Petrov, V., Shibeko, V., Sobolev, N., Sutkaitis, O. & Tyupenko, T. 2013: Barents Protected Area Network. Recommendations for strengthening the Protected area Network in the Barents Region. - Bpan policy brief. 4 pp.