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### The Oulanka- Paanajärvi Transboundary Protected Area

The Oulanka- Paanajärvi Transboundary Protected Area consists of two national parks joining at the border between Finland and Russia. The protected area has been an effort of close cooperation between Finland and Russia from the very start. In 1956, Oulanka national park was formed in Finland with the Paanajärvi national park formation in Russia close behind in 1992 (Bizhon & Hovi, 2011, para. 1). According to the Global Transboundary Conservation Network's Case Study concerning the Transboundary Protected Area (TBPA) by Alexander Bizhon (Park Director of Paanajärvi National Park), and Matt Hovi (Park Superintendent, Metsähallitus, and Natural Heritage Services member), "the basic structures and services in Paanajärvi were in the early years developed with the help from the staff of Oulanka, and larger steps were taken during joint development projects in the 1990's and 2000's" (Bizhon & Hovi, 2011, para. 1). Both national parks are Category II national parks under the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). As of 2005, both parks are also members of the EUROPARC TransParcNet and have received the Transboundary Certificate for their "model cooperation across borders" ("Oulanka- Paanajärvi Transboundary Parks", 2016, para. 1). In 2002, Oulanka national park received the international PAN Parks Certificate. Areas in compliance with the PAN parks foundation follow the criteria of having unique and undisturbed nature, efficient management practices, and have local community participation and leadership within management practices ("Twin parks boosting eco-tourism for a whole area", 2010, para.

9). In October 2005, Paanajärvi national park also became a member of PAN Parks foundation of Europe (“Twin parks boosting eco-tourism for a whole area”, 2010, para. 8).

The very apparent cooperation between these two parks is inextricably linked to their desire to promote eco-tourism to the areas. The large area between Oulanka and Paanajärvi is home to 600 species of vascular plants, mosses and fungi resulting from a “significantly higher level of biodiversity compared to the surroundings due to microclimatic and geological factors” (Bizhon & Hovi, 2011, para. 2). This rich biodiversity draws 160,000 annual visitors to the park which produces a significant amount of the parks’ tourism income (Bizhon & Hovi, 2011, para. 3).

Another desirable element of close cooperation is the protected areas’ importance to the promotion of peace and fraternity between Finland and Russia. Finland owned the western part of Paanajärvi before World War II, so post war attitudes of Finnish people towards Russia have been negative (“Oulanka- Paanajärvi Transboundary Parks”, 2016, para. 2) Due to this nature, the parks are representative of moving forward from wartime attitudes and allow people of the region of travel and back and forth freely within the park.

This cooperation allows the parks to be jointly operated. Oulanka national park is managed by the Natural Heritage Services of Metsähallitus (which is run by the state) and Paanajärvi national park is operated under the federal authority of Russia (Bizhon & Hovi, 2011, para. 6).

Cooperation was formed not only for economic and cultural purposes, but also to combat the impacts of climate change on the area. The rich biodiversity of the area is currently being impacted on the species and habitat levels. Both the Oulanka and Paanajärvi national parks’

interest in eco-tourism has enabled them to reap the benefits of working together and sharing experiences in order to efficiently ensure that international funding is properly accessed to handle shared threats like climate change and biodiversity loss which can leave a dent in either park's tourism budget ("Oulanka- Paanajärvi Transboundary Parks", 2016, para. 2). In a case study from The EUROPARC network outlining the development and implementation of European Union policies on climate change, it was concluded that climate change facilitates the spreading of alien species, facilitates biodiversity loss, facilitates the declined natural health of not only national parks but also their surrounding areas, and also that climate change adaptation and mitigation can serve as an opportunity for the increased maintenance of protected areas ("Climate change in N2000 sites and other protected areas", 2013). The Oulanka-Paanajärvi TBPA recognizes that climate change and the issues that ensue because of it, goes beyond national boundaries and political borders to impact both national parks' wildlife, tourism, economies, biodiversity and surrounding land. The joint management plan for Oulanka-Paanajärvi recognizes several threats including: climate change's effects on vegetation in the high summits in Paanajärvi, the management of the brown trout population's migration through the TBPA, and the grazing pressure on the lichen biomass by reindeer in Oulanka (Bizhon & Hovi, 2011, para. 7).

As with any transboundary protection area, the objectives of legal protections, different stakeholders, and the different actors and authorities involved will all be slightly different with differing motivations behind each group. This is no different in the Oulanka- Paanajärvi TBPA case. Among the stakeholders are the local inhabitants, tourists, tourism businesses, local administration, the national actors for both Finland and Russia, and a few environmental non-governmental organizations (NGO's).

There are many agreements, initiatives and “hands-on” conservation activities crossing national borders between Finland and Russia (Ministry of the Environment of Finland and Natural Heritage Services of Metsähallitus, 2012). In Oulanka national park, the cooperation with neighboring countries has been funded by the Natural Heritage Services of Metsähallitus, European Union initiatives and also by the Ministry of the Environment of Finland (Ministry of the Environment of Finland and Natural Heritage Services of Metsähallitus, 2012). In Paanajärvi national park, the project is funded by the Federal Authority of Russia.

Measures have been strategically placed to ensure local stakeholder participation in protected area management. Although these measures are set forth by the nation of Finland and Finnish groups, the high level of transnational cooperation between Finland and Russia have ensured these measures are applied to the Oulanka- Paanajärvi TBPA. A few of these measures are: 1) the legal obligation to negotiate with Sámi Parliament and the reindeer herding cooperatives, 2) an adopted governance strategy in compliance with the Kvarken Archipelago World Heritage Site, 3) the mandatory translations of informative and educational environmental documents to Swedish and Sámi languages, 4) cooperative, inclusive, public forums and group meetings for decisions involving management of protected areas, 5) co-managed protected areas to ensure management harmonization, 6) official cooperation agreements between the Reindeer Herders' Association, Island Committee and other important stakeholders, partners and sectors to ensure joint management is taking place, and 7) a hands-on, participatory approach to the management planning processes (Ministry of the Environment of Finland and Natural Heritage Services of Metsähallitus, 2012).

While participatory, cooperative and inclusive management processes are vital, shared key development challenges and shared long term goals are also mutual between stake holding

groups. According to the Ministry of the Environment of Finland and Natural Heritage Services of Metsähallitus, threats to the protected areas in Finland are the same as global threats to biodiversity. A few of those being the economic exploitation of natural environments, forestry and habitat conversion, climate change, invasive alien species, eutrophication and pollution (Ministry of the Environment of Finland and Natural Heritage Services of Metsähallitus, 2012). Among the shared concerns between Finland and Russia are habitat change, habitat fragmentation, and the future development of the systems of protected areas between the two nations (Ministry of the Environment of Finland and Natural Heritage Services of Metsähallitus, 2012). Both nations desire the easy ability to cross the border from Oulanka national park in Finland to Paanajärvi national park in Russia, increased but sustainable eco-tourism, durable relationships between the two parks and the two nations, and the continued financing and project funding for the continued development of the protected region (Ministry of the Environment of Finland and Natural Heritage Services of Metsähallitus, 2012).

The Oulanka- Paanajärvi TBPA has proposed certain mitigation measures to help reach their long term goals and address concerns relating to the havoc being caused by climate change. One example of this can be found in the case study from The EUROPARC network outlining the development and implementation of EU policies on climate change. Assisted Migration was proposed to prevent the loss of biodiversity caused by climate change and habitat fragmentation in the TBPA. This approach would “assist” species in the move to areas and different habitats where they are predicted to move due to climate change to prevent their loss from not being able to adapt or move quickly enough (“Climate change in N2000 sites and other protected areas”, 2013). More research into the approach is needed, given popular opposition including loss of biological authenticity and conservation ethics.

The national parks also want to implement actions that guarantee the fulfillment of Natura 2000 conservation goals. In order to comply with the Natura 2000 conservation goals, protected areas and nations must be willing to harmonize policies with one another. They must also utilize the capacity and ambition of the Natura 2000 network to combat biodiversity loss and keep parks maintained in the process (“Climate change in N2000 sites and other protected areas”, 2013). Oulanka- Paanajärvi TBPA has proven through decades of cooperation and innovative thinking leading to innovative and inclusive policies that they are willing to step up to this task.

Oulanka national park in Finland in particular has expressed great interest and action into developing an ecologically functional and comprehensive network of protected areas. Through partnering with Paanajärvi national park in Russia to combine their parks into a TBPA and through their promotion of restoration activities that enhance connectivity and resilience against climate change, as earlier discussed in this paper alongside the case studies of the Climate Change in N2000 sites and other protected areas, their interests and the interests of their natural and societal stake holders are easier met and cooperated with.

An example of this can be seen with the Finnish group Metsähallitus with their land use planning programs to conserve biodiversity by supporting the protected area network (Ministry of the Environment of Finland and Natural Heritage Services of Metsähallitus, 2012). Metsähallitus, a state enterprise, is concerned specifically in this project with the construction of green infrastructure where forests (managed by Metsähallitus) would supplement the protected area network. This would aid in the creation of ecological corridors that are protected within the commercially managed forests to aid in the reduction of biodiversity loss, biological movement and the overall conservation of the areas the ecological corridors would run through (Ministry of

the Environment of Finland and Natural Heritage Services of Metsähallitus, 2012). This plan to battle the impacts of climate change also has the potential to boost ecotourism, another one of the shared goals of Finland and Russia. To ensure the changes made and the attention drawn to the area in the form of tourism would be sustainable with a minimal human impact, the TBPA would also adopt Limits of Acceptable Changes (LAC) Policies (Ministry of the Environment of Finland and Natural Heritage Services of Metsähallitus, 2012).

As with all policies, there are barriers to implementation that must also be discussed. Despite efforts of harmonization, one of these barriers arises from a lack of consistent and comprehensive targets, and the action plans and goals that include measurable indicators for success or need between Finland and Russia (Ministry of the Environment of Finland and Natural Heritage Services of Metsähallitus, 2012). Finland argues that neither Finland nor Russia have national visions that are up to par with the before mentioned standards. Arbitrary criteria for such goals and national visions plays a part in the inconsistencies of ideas between the two nations as well (Ministry of the Environment of Finland and Natural Heritage Services of Metsähallitus, 2012). Limits on manpower, park staff, time, monetary and human resources also slows the executions of activities that maintain the TBPA along with slowing the mitigation against climate change. However, the largest barrier of all suggested in the Ministry of the Environment of Finland and Natural Heritage Services of Metsähallitus' report was the lack of knowledge and understanding associated with climate change, biological diversity, environmental degradation and conservation best practices by policy makers and the general public. This is where proper environmental education and communication become vital, because without them, communication itself becomes the barrier to the implementation of policies and

best practices (Ministry of the Environment of Finland and Natural Heritage Services of Metsähallitus, 2012).

In conclusion, the Oulanka- Paanajärvi Transboundary Protected Area is rather ahead of its time in terms of cooperation between nations, and ideas and mitigation to battle climate change through stakeholder participation and inclusion. There still is room for progress though. Over the coming years, with advancements in communication and education surrounding environmental threats and climate change, policy makers and stakeholders will hopefully be in a better, more informed position to make climate change mitigation and biological conservation a success in this TBPA along with reaching their economic goals. Through education and cooperation, this success can be made a reality and the Oulanka- Paanajärvi Transboundary Protected Area is well on its way to that success.

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