



Russia and Northern Europe

Russia was the first country to accept Canada's invitation to develop Model Forests when it created the Gassinski Model Forest in Khabarovsk Krai in 1994. Located in the Russian Far East, the Gassinski Model Forest helped to establish the first national park in the region, enhance employment for the indigenous Nanai people, and introduce the use of criteria and indicators of sustainable forest management.

In the first five years of its existence, work included substantial data acquisition and analysis. This was then used by the partners of the Model Forest to develop a long-term sustainable development strategy for the broader region of the Model Forest. The government of Khabarovsk Krai adopted this as the official development strategy.

In the European part of Russia, a number of individual landscape-level and partnership-based initiatives emerged that were initially unaffiliated with the International Model Forest Network. However, in 2007, representatives of four sites – Komi, Pskov, Kovdozersky and Kologrivski – met in St. Petersburg, Russia, with representatives of the Gassinski Model Forest and the Federal Forest Agency to discuss working together and developing an informal national network as part of the IMFN. An agreement was struck and work continues today to explore other options for Model Forest development in Russia, including through affiliation with neighbouring countries in the Baltic Sea region and with other boreal nations who are members of the IMFN.

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Sweden joined the IMFN in 2004 when the Vilhelmina Model Forest was established. Since then, other countries within the Baltic Sea region have also turned their attention to the Model Forest approach, seeing it as an innovative way to advance the sustainable management of forests and landscapes, including addressing issues such as participatory processes, conservation and the sustainability of resource-based communities.

In 2006, with funding from the European Union's Baltic Sea Region Interreg Neighbourhood Programme, the "Baltic Forest Project" was developed. Its purpose was to explore how the Model Forest concept might be promoted in northern Europe as a complement to already existing landscape-level initiatives. The focus of

the Baltic Forest Project was enhancement of regional development based on sustainable use of forests and elevated forest sector cooperation. Eight Baltic Sea region countries were involved. Among the main conclusions of the project were that:

- The Model Forest concept would add to the overall capacity in landscape-level sustainability
- Some countries – notably, Sweden, Poland and Finland – already have available infrastructures that allow for a scaling up and establishment of a network of landscape case studies in connection with the IMFN
- The Baltic Forest Project resulted in strengthened cooperation with Northwest Russia as a natural regional extension

Milestones

- 1994** Gassinski Model Forest established in Russia
- 2004** Vilhelmina Model Forest established in Sweden
- 2005** Kovdozersky Model Forest established in Russia
- 2006** Two Model Forests in Russia join the IMFN: Komi and Pskov
Baltic Forest Project begins
- 2007** Agreement between the Russian Model Forests to develop a national Model Forest Network
- 2008** Bergslagen, Sweden to develop a Model Forest
- 2010** Gassinski Model Forest closes
- 2011** Development of the Baltic Landscape Initiative between Sweden, Finland, Poland, Belarus and Northwest Russia initiated

Looking Forward

Based on the success of the Baltic Forest Project and parallel activities to explore landscape-level approaches to sustainability, plans are underway for a new regional project on Model Forest development and networking in Sweden, Finland, Poland, Belarus and Northwest Russia. In this proposed "Baltic Landscape Project" there is a stronger focus on creating new case studies to be connected with the IMFN and creating a long-term foundation for a regional network. The project's core idea is to implement, evaluate and define Model Forest principles in the context of the current needs and premises concerning sustainable use and governance of landscapes in northern Europe.



Gassinski Model Forest, Russia

Activities Undertaken in the Komi Model Forest

The Komi Model Forest is located at the western base of the Ural Mountains in Russia. Here the taiga forest landscape covers 89 % of Komi Republic (417 000 square kilometres). Because industrial logging began only 80 years ago, the landscape is relatively untouched. This pristine landscape is rich in biodiversity and therefore has a high conservation value. At the same time, the taiga forest still provides the base for local wood industries and is used for many traditional purposes by local villagers. Tension among forest stakeholders had arisen because of differences in opinion over conservation and economic needs. The Model Forest concept was seen as a viable approach to improve the management of old-growth forests that were endangered by unsustainable forest practices, and to resolve conflicts between forest industry workers and traditional forest users.

The Komi Model Forest has successfully implemented a wide arrange of activities since its inception, including:

- Undertaking an inventory of old-growth forests in Komi Republic and the development of management strategies to protect biodiversity
- Acting as a pilot site for Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification in Komi Republic, developing a regional FSC standard, and encouraging others to become FSC-certified (2.2 million hectares of the republic are now FSC certified). The Model Forest experience was also vital for FSC certification of an IKEA project in the neighbouring region (100 000 hectares)
- Developing procedures to involve local stakeholders in sustainable forest management and decision-making; the experience of local involvement in forest management has been disseminated in two other regions of Komi Republic
- Testing innovative methods to adapt forest practices to sustainable management requirements, the recommendations of which were adopted by the State Forest Service
- Developing and implementing training and extension courses to disseminate knowledge and experience beyond the Model Forest; courses have been offered to approximately 1 200 people from the State Forest Service, the forest industry, teachers and non-government organizations
- Developing recommendations for Komi Republic officials and decision-makers to introduce and legally adopt sustainable forest management practices



Climate Change Activities in the Vilhelmina Model Forest

In the Vilhelmina Model Forest, most of the information on changes in weather patterns and climate comes from interviews with local elders and reindeer herders, most of whom suggest that the winter season is changing – notably, with warmer and shorter winters now occurring and changes to snow types and cover. For example, elders have observed that rivers and lakes freeze later, if at all. In addition, warmer summers have made reindeer herders particularly vulnerable to rain-on-snow events and to rapid shifts in temperature, which may act to prevent access to winter grazing areas. Some herders argue that such events have increased in frequency.

Reindeer herding communities in the region already express fear of changing weather patterns, and many practices have had to be abandoned. For example, many traditional migration routes over water are now inaccessible because of unsafe conditions. Most herders are also restricted in their ability to adapt because of financial constraints and partly because of land rights issues, such as access to grazing lands.

The Model Forest has been involved in capacity-building activities and awareness raising about climate change and its potential effects. Reindeer herders have changed some of their practices and are using technology for help, such as putting GPS-collars on the reindeer to more efficiently monitor herd location. Another measure being used increasingly is supplementary feeding of reindeer during the winter season in order to reduce the degradation of winter forage areas.

Model Forest partners have also launched several research and best-practice-oriented projects. An example is the widespread use of experimental plots and demonstration areas in the forestry sector. In the forestry–reindeer husbandry interface, the Model Forest is involved in developing and assessing a planning tool called Renbruksplaner, aimed at increasing collaboration between stakeholder groups and at ensuring greater use of climate-sensitive planning measures.

Sami Reindeer herders in Vilhelmina Model Forest, Sweden

