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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

44th meeting
Strasbourg, 2-6 December 2024

Bureau of the Standing Committee

10-12 September 2024

Strasbourg

Complaint on Stand-by: 2017/06

**Possible negative impact on Breiðafjörður Nature Reserve's authentic birch
woods from new road infrastructure**

(Iceland)

- GOVERNMENT REPORT -

*Document prepared by
Ministry of Environment of Iceland*



Recommendation no. 218 (2022) on the possible negative impact on Breiðafjörður Nature Reserve and its surroundings from new road infrastructure

- Update Report

In Iceland's first update report regarding Recommendation no. 218, information was broken down with respect to the nine sub-recommendations of Recommendation 218.

This report will inform of any status updates since August 2023. Added information is in blue below the text previously updated on. If blue text has not been added to a sub-recommendation, the status of that respective recommendation has not changed since August 2023.

1. Ensure an inclusive and transparent consultation process with all relevant stakeholders at both local and national level regarding the route B-H project implementation (including monitoring, mitigation, and compensatory plans).

The Icelandic Road and Coastal Administration (IRCA) has set up a [website](#) with relevant information of the project. The website includes a [link](#) where reports regarding the project can be found. The website also has a link to a [geoportal](#) for the road project. On the website viewers are encouraged to send comments or questions regarding the project.

In May, with the initiative of Landvernd, a meeting was held. The ministry held the meeting, with IRCA, Landvernd, Fuglavernd, representatives from the Breiðafjörður Committee, Reykhólar municipality and The Natural Science Institute of the Westfjords attending (NAVE). At the meeting representatives from the authorities gave information on the status of the recommendations and answered questions. The plan is to hold another meeting by the end of this year, or in the beginning of 2024.

Four reports have been added to the website:

[Memo on restoration of birch woodlands \(August, 2023\)](#)

[Update-document on the collection of birch seeds \(August, 2023\)](#)

[Memo on compensatory measures due to disruption of birch woods \(October, 2023\)](#)

[Habitats and birch biomass-final report \(October, 2023\)](#)

In February 2024 with the initiative of The Environmental Ministry a meeting was held with Landvernd. The meeting was held due to managerial change at Landvernd, where Landvernd's new manager was informed of Recommendation 218 and its current status. A short introduction to the Bern Convention was also held for the new manager.

2. Finalize the detailed plan for compensatory measures for the route B-H, in consultation with the relevant (local and national) stakeholders, in order to be able to implement the measures as soon as possible and assess their efficiency.

Here is NAVÉ's research, monitoring and restoration [report](#) from 2021 that includes compensatory measures.



3. Update the mitigation and monitoring plan for the route B-H according to the following:

a. add a consultation plan that should include regular updates on monitoring results and their implications in relation to decision-making; the consultation process should ensure collection of suggestions or data from interested stakeholders and could be used as a mechanism to transfer good practices at national level (possibly supporting development of national monitoring standards);

Here is a link to a [cooperation plan](#).

b. add a detailed risk assessment and contingency plan with predefined procedures/solutions to be implemented in cases where the proposed mitigation and compensatory measures may lead to sub-optimal results;

The stakeholders raised this question at the meeting in May 2023, i.e. what solutions could be possible if results would be sub-optimal. This was followed with a discussion on how it could be done for the various ecosystem variables that are being monitored. There was no clear conclusion at the meeting regarding for what variables this would be possible, but IRCA and NAVE are looking into how, and for what monitoring variables this could be implemented into their work for the road project.

c. ensure that the existing regulation (Article 16 of regulation no. 772/2012 - Regulation on planning permits) on a clear and transparent procedure of stopping the construction until a proper solution will be agreed upon, will be used in the case where a compensatory measure may be identified as not being effective;

According to the mentioned regulation (Article 16 of regulation no. 772/2012 - Regulation on planning permits), Reykhólar municipality has the responsibility to monitor this. After the Recommendation was approved at the 42nd meeting, the ministry sent a notice to Reykhólar municipality. A PDF version of Recommendation 218 was attached, and the ministry kindly asked the municipality to be aware of the recommendations put forth in Rec. 218.

d. include in the monitoring plan success/failure indicators/thresholds for the proposed measures and predefined procedures for how to adapt technical solutions based on the real time data provided by the monitoring results;

This is included in the monitoring plan in some cases, might need to be clarified better in other cases, and will be reviewed when the monitoring plan will be updated.

e. add as monitoring objectives the habitat fragmentation and fauna mortality in relation to terrestrial species;

IRCA will seek recommendation from NAVE regarding conducting such monitoring objectives. They will then be added to the monitoring plan.



f. consider the secondary effects on nature related with land-use changes during the development scenarios analysis once it is prepared by the Steering Group.

See answer to no. 8

g. add a chapter on lessons learnt to facilitate the transferability of local knowledge accumulation (considering that the mitigation and monitoring plan is a first for Iceland in terms of complexity).

Will be done.

h. consider as a high priority discussing with all relevant stakeholders (including the complainant) the studies that led to the current parameters of the Gufufjörður bridge before finalizing the construction.

The Gufufjörður bridge was discussed at the meeting in May 2023. Stakeholders mentioned their worries, and IRCA explained how they approached the design differently than done with older bridges, leading to changes in the design of the bridge.

i. document that the changes made to reduce the impact on specific features beyond the terms stipulated in the EIA have had no impact on other natural features.

Work has not started on this part/Monitoring measures will take time.

- 4. Ensure that the GIS data related to the road project will be updated regularly and will remain available throughout the whole monitoring period; the relevant authorities or Breiðafjörður Committee should facilitate a working group dedicated to harmonizing data-collection and database structures in order to create a functional tool to support the decision-making process at the scale of the entire Breiðafjörður area.**

GIS data has been made available [here](#).

- 5. Allocate sufficient resources for adaptation and implementation of adequate mitigation / compensation measures and monitoring activities related to the road project, including a side fund that should be used to respond to possible sub-optimal results of the implemented measures, should it be the case.**

The project is one of IRCA's biggest projects in terms of construction, as well as mitigation measures.

- 6. Document the overall costs being allocated to mitigation and compensatory measures for the route P-H and compare them with those of the alternative routes which prioritized avoidance such as the tunnel solution, as part of the lesson-learning process.**

All cost is documented and will be added to lessons learned.



7. **Start the development of the cumulative effect assessment as a pilot-study in the Breiðafjörður area using all relevant implemented projects and the current route B-H.**

Under consideration.

8. **Support the overall conservation of the Breiðafjörður area and consider developing it as a relevant case study for Iceland (by implementing the following suggested actions that could strengthen the conservation of other parts of the Breiðafjörður area):**

a-f: As previously discussed (at the OSA meeting, at the 42nd Standing Committee meeting, and at the meeting of the authorities and stakeholders in May 2023) the outcome of how this suggested action will be approached relies on what suggestions the steering committee on Framtíð Breiðafjarðar will deliver to the minister. The committee has not submitted those suggestions, but it is expected that they will be submitted early 2024.

- a. ensure that a Consultation Group to the Steering Group is set up as soon as possible, and that it will be inclusive and the process transparent;**

n/a

- b. within the aforementioned groups, discuss the possibility of including the Breiðafjörður area on the candidate list of Emerald Network sites (especially as the current conservation act is considered compatible with the Emerald Network requirements), considering Recommendation No. 157 (2011, revised 2019) on the status of candidate Emerald sites and guidelines on the criteria for their nomination.**

- c. strengthen the Breiðafjörður Conservation Act (1995);**

- d. implement a sound overall monitoring plan for the Breiðafjörður area;**

- e. start developing a comprehensive database as an efficient support for decision-making for the Breiðafjörður area;**

- f. develop a model-management plan for the Breiðafjörður area which should harmonize the sustainable development needs with the conservation objectives of the conservation plan requested by law.**

As of March 2024, the steering group has not submitted its final suggestions to the minister. However, the group has reached a consensus on a draft of suggestions that currently are being introduced to and discussed with local communities (introductions meetings have been held at the Breiðafjörður area). Following these meetings, considering the results of the meetings, the steering group will submit its suggestions to the minister.



The draft suggestions are:

- Use Act no. 88/2018 on ocean and coastal planning to develop Breiðafjörður's first plan.
- Look into and clarify existing law on the protection of Breiðafjörður no. 54/1995.
- Strengthen research on Breiðafjörður's flora and fauna, as well as on nature's, society's and local economy's capacity with regard to utilizing the bay's natural resources.
- Create a research plan to research the utilization-capacity of Breiðafjörður's ecosystem.
- Strengthen public support to innovation in the area.
- Strengthen the presence of rangers at Breiðafjörður.
- Creating a joint venue for the local communities to cooperate. Currently municipalities close to Breiðafjörður-bay are divided into two different venues depending on their geographical position (ca. north of the bay/south of the bay). The municipalities around the bay belong to either of those venues.
- Strengthen local development.
- "Cost-benefit" analysis of registering Breiðafjörður as a Ramsar site, of nominating the area as a UNESCO site, or changing its protections status to a national park.
- Promoting opportunities in tourism at the area.
- Strengthen the work of The Breiðafjörður Committee by increasing its annual budget.

9. Invites the relevant NGOs, scientific community, and civil society to:

Follow the above recommendations with regard to cooperation with the authorities, including by sharing data, engaging in cooperation bodies and activities, and agreeing on a detailed time plan of next steps (inspired by the proposal in the mission report).