

Strasbourg, 26 November 2002
[diplome/docs/2003/de15e_03]

PE-S-DE (2002) 15
(Original integral version in French)

**Committee for the activities of the Council of Europe
in the field of biological and landscape diversity
(CO-DBP)**

Group of specialists – European Diploma for Protected Areas

20-21 January 2003
Room 2, Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg

**Kostomuksha Strict Nature Reserve
(Russian Federation)**

RENEWAL

Expert report by
Mr Hervé Lethier, EMC²I
(Switzerland)

*Document established by
the Directorate of Culture and Cultural and Natural Heritage*

The European Diploma for Protected Areas was first awarded to the Kostomuksha Strict Nature Reserve in 1998 and is now being renewed for the first time.

The Secretariat did not accompany the expert on his visit to the reserve.

Appendix I reproduces Resolution (98) 24 which was adopted when the Diploma was awarded. In Appendix II the Secretariat presents a draft resolution for possible renewal.

The visit to the reserve was initially planned from 23 to 26 June 2002 but actually took place on 25 and 26 June, owing to administrative problems arising from the type of visa issued by the Russian authorities. Nevertheless the appraisal took place in good conditions, despite the expert's extremely short stay on site.

The expert had been asked to pay particular attention to the question of the extension of the reserve.

1. THE KOSTOMUKSHA STRICT NATURE RESERVE

1-1 LOCATION

The Kostomuksha strict nature reserve lies about ten kilometres from the small town of Kostomuksha (pop. 35,000) in the most western part of Karelia, on the Finnish border.

It covers an area of some 47,500 hectares consisting of primary and secondary forests typical of the northern taiga, interspersed with large lakes, including lake Kamennoye, and intermediate malarial areas as well as a river, the Kamennoye river ("stone river"), whose biological interest is described below.

1-2 INTEREST

The diploma was awarded to the reserve in category B.

1-2-1 General criteria

1.2.1.1 European interest: the reserve is undeniably of European interest; in particular, it is home to one of the very last wild forest reindeer populations (*Rangifer tarandus fennicus*) and numerous animal and plant species¹ of particular importance to the preservation of biological diversity in Europe; it includes habitats of species that are endemic² or have unfavourable conservation status³ and provides reproduction sites for protected species and/or migration stages⁴ for several of them. Furthermore it also meets several of the criteria under § I.A.3 of the regulations and includes particularly beautiful sites and landscapes, some of which testify to the rural history of Europe, such as the village of Akonlahti, ruined in 1958.

1.2.1.2. Protection measures: the area enjoys a highly protective legal status geared to maintaining its characteristics. Although there is no proper management plan, it has a zoning plan that takes its sensitive nature into account⁵; activities in and uses of the area (fishing, hunting, walking, camping, haymaking, gathering etc) are regulated and managed in line with protection constraints.

¹ Cf appendices 1 (list of vertebrates) and 2 (list of species) for the Kostomuksha strict nature reserve.

² The forest reindeer as well as a sub-species of holobiotic Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar Sebago*).

³ eg: *Lynx lynx*, *Gulo gulo* and ten or so nesting birds appearing in the red book of species of Russia and the Finno-Scandinavian region, such as the golden eagle (*Haliaeetus chrysaetos*), white-tailed eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*), osprey (*Pandion Haliaeetus*).

⁴ We were able to observe Black-throated divers (*Gavia arctica*) during the visit for example; species such as the whooper swan (*Cygnus cygnus*), white-tailed eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) and crane (*Grus grus*) may also be seen.

⁵ Cf appendices 3 (map of facilities), 4, 5 and 6 (maps of land uses and activities).

1-2-2 Specific criteria

1.2.2.1 Main purpose of the area: the area meets all specific criteria 1 to 6 of the regulations; the general protection system applied to it fulfils the objective of conserving biological and landscape diversity and ecosystems as required by the regulations.

1.2.2.2 Other purposes: it also meets specific criteria 1, 3, 4 and 5 of § B of the regulations.

2 APPRAISAL

2-1 WITH REFERENCE TO APPENDIX 3 TO THE REGULATIONS

2-1 European interest: (cf § 1-1-2-1 above) the area meets this criterion.

2-1-2 Merits and protection system:

2-1-2-1 The area has not undergone any major alterations since the diploma award in 1998; there has been little change in the organisation chart of its management team, although the team's tasks have been refocused, shifting from research to conservation⁶. Officially, the transfer of competence effected in 2000 has not had a major impact on the management of the reserve which is now entrusted to the Ministry of Natural Resources. In practice, however, it appears that these new circumstances occasionally lead to hesitation on the part of the management when allocating tasks at central level; the expert was aware of a similar apprehension in the Tsentralno-Chernozemny reserve.

2-1-2-2 The area has not suffered any significant damage and the agricultural and industrial activities within it or on its outskirts have not adversely affected its state of conservation; 7.5 million m³ of water are pumped from the reserve each year to supply the town of Kostomuksha and the local mining company without any visible impact on the reserve⁷; furthermore, the mining company⁸ gives the reserve an annual grant of USD 6,000 which it has used *inter alia* to produce a new brochure when celebrating its 20th year of existence. However, it is regrettable that the reserve does not generate income from this resource, which would increase its budget funding.

Tourism activity has declined and has always remained below the accommodation capacity of the reserve and its facilities. The fact that the diploma area is close to the border has contrasting effects on conservation. The presence of a continuous, permanent fence within the diploma area is undoubtedly an obstacle to the conservation of the forest reindeer, for example, and a great many other land and aquatic vertebrates. On the other hand, its border location makes it subject to close surveillance which can but improve protection and limit poaching and human interference; an encouraging degree of cooperation has been developed between the border police and the reserve.

2-1-2-3 The zoning of activities and land use is unchanged since the diploma was awarded.

2-1-2-4 The status of small enclaves located within the reserve has been clarified.

2-1-2-5 Land occupancy and use have not been modified to any real extent.

2-1-2-6 The plan to create a museum near the reserve's management building envisaged in 1998 has been dropped in favour of another project on the site of the ruined village of Akonlahti, where 4 ha of land have been reserved for that purpose; funding is yet to be found.

⁶ Cf appendix 7 (organisation chart of the reserve).

⁷ This level of pumping is still below the maximum annual capacity, put at about 15 million m³ by the Russian experts, and has remained stable since 1994-95.

⁸ Okatysh company.

2-1-2-7 The reserve still has no management plan; nevertheless, the actions of the management team have had an overall coherency and tended towards better management. Technical cooperation with the local Finnish authorities has greatly contributed to this situation and sets a fine example of transfrontier cooperation between players with common interests of conserving biological and landscape diversity.

2-1-2-8 There has been no other significant change to visitor facilities and infrastructure.

2-1-2-9 There is longstanding scientific cooperation with St Petersburg University; similar cooperation with Petrozavodsk University⁹ began in 2002. The expert met groups of students participating in field studies on biodiversity during the appraisal. Research activities by reserve staff have been cut down markedly in the last five years in order to devote more effort to training, education and communication work. Nevertheless, the reserve's research managers continue to carry out remarkable work in gathering and monitoring field data, with help from the technicians and wardens.

The data gathered indicate relatively small animal populations that vary greatly from one year to another, which is not surprising in these types of habitat.

2-1-2-10 The reserve is a member of Europarks and the Finno-Russian association of protected areas. It is involved in an environmental education programme of the European Union and associated with the Finnish sector under a friendship programme signed in 1990.

2-1-2-11 Unfortunately, it was not possible to meet other local protagonists during such a short stay; links are close and ongoing between the reserve and local civil society; cooperation with the socio-professional spheres and the universities has already been mentioned, and contact with Kostomuksha schools has also been frequent, with twinning between some of them and schools in the Finnish town of Kuhmo focusing on the theme of the reserve. The reserve's management appears to have excellent relations with Kostomuksha town councillors as well as with the local press.

2-2 WITH REFERENCE TO THE DECISION TO AWARD THE DIPLOMA

2-2-1 The decision to award the diploma:

2-2-1-1 Recommendation 1 (study the possibilities for extension of the present perimeter of the reserve, taking account of the limits of the hydrographic drainage basin): There has been contact between the reserve management and the authorities of the regions of Kostomuksha and Muyezerka, where the diploma area is located. Although the Karelian government is pleased that the area holds the diploma, it remains cautious as regards an extension of it. The plan to create the Kalevala national park, 40 km north of Kostomuksha, now casts this question in a different light; this new protected area covering 90,000 ha would enjoy a level of protection less strict than that of Kostomuksha but there might be grounds for joint management of the two as they greatly complement each other in many respects; the diploma area might include the park owing to its nearness to Kostomuksha and its substantial ecological interest, as long as the Russian authorities lodge the request.

Such an extension would fit the idea of a vast transfrontier diploma area stretching across both Russian and Finnish territory. Map 1 shows the geographical location of the current protected areas to which the Kalevala national park would be added. Recognition would be a logical step in both ecological and institutional terms, in view of the longstanding formal cooperation between the two countries in the sphere of protected areas; it would facilitate the management of these areas, which are home to the same fauna populations and bear unique testimony to the cultural and natural heritage of this part of Karelia. It is fully in keeping with the spirit of Articles 1, 2.3 and 3.2 of the regulations. The Council of Europe could make an approach to the two governments concerned with a view to facilitating the process.

⁹ See appendix 8 (list of publications by the reserve since the award of the European diploma).

Threats to the Kamennoye ("stone") river drainage basin have remained moderate to date; however the reserve perimeter should be adjusted to include the entire basin and the strip between the reserve's western boundary and the border; this recommendation was made when the diploma was awarded. In the short term, the reserve's south-west boundary should be realigned to follow the natural shores of lake Kamennoye.

2-2-1-2 Recommendation 1 (draw up a management plan for the whole of the reserve): appendix 2 to the new regulations states that the area must have a development or management plan that is finalised or in preparation (Art. I.B.4). Moreover, having a plan is an obligation for diploma renewal. The reserve management is keenly aware of the need to draw up a plan but currently lacks the funding with which to produce it; the matter has been raised in bilateral local meetings between the Russian and Finnish authorities. The preparation of a plan can but be a condition of diploma renewal¹⁰, and its implementation over the next five years a strong recommendation at the very least.

2-2-1-3 Recommendation 2 (ensure the maintenance of strict regulation to control poaching and tourism): the trends of the last five years have been in keeping with this recommendation.

2-2-1-4 Recommendation 3 (create a visitor centre of an educational nature): a museum has been installed in the park management building; work on building renovation has also been carried out. The creation of a visitors centre in Akonlahti would be an extremely interesting measure and more ambitious than the initial project envisaged in 1998.

2-2-1-5 Recommendation 4 (increase the human and financial resources of the reserve devoted to research and encourage in particular the pursuit of the studies already begun): the reserve has substantially refocused its research policy over the last five years by making increasing use of outside services provided by universities. *A priori*, this could be beneficial if it does not ultimately lead to a cut in the reserve's research effort in the long term. Improving knowledge and monitoring changes in the long term must remain among the reserve management's top priorities.

2-2-1-6 Recommendation 5 (pursue and strengthen cooperation with the Finnish authorities): transfrontier cooperation between the two countries is cordial and exemplary in every respect. It seems that links could be closer still on matters such as the management of the Kostomuksha reserve.

2.2.2 The instructions of the Council of Europe Group of specialists

The members of the Group of specialists asked that the expert pay particular attention to the question of the extension of the reserve. This point was dealt with in § I.2.1.1.a of the report.

CONCLUSION

The expert proposes that the European diploma be renewed, with the following two conditions and five recommendations attached to the renewal:

- **Condition 1:** prepare or preferably finalise a management plan for the reserve for the next five years;
- **Condition 2:** adjust the reserve's south-west boundary to align it with the natural shore of lake Kamennoye.
- **Recommendation 1:** consider a request to extend the diploma area, to include the Kalevala national park and the territory between the current western boundary and the border;
- **Recommendation 2:** explore the possibility of removing or adapting the fence located inside the reserve in order to facilitate movements of large animals;

¹⁰ The Council of Europe should be able to facilitate the raising of funds for the implementation of such a plan, either from the Russian authorities themselves or from potential backers.

- **Recommendation 3:** create an information centre on the reserve's cultural and natural heritage, as envisaged at Akonlahti;
- **Recommendation 4:** maintain the internal research effort (state and development of biodiversity and landscapes) within the reserve and in conjunction with local universities;
- **Recommendation 5:** step up cooperation with the Finnish authorities, particularly where the reserve's management and facilities are concerned.

Appendix I

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

RESOLUTION (98) 24

**ON THE AWARD OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA
TO THE STRICT NATURE RESERVE OF KOSTOMUKSHA
(Russian Federation)**

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 18 September 1998
at the 641st meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.a of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Having regard to Resolution (65) 6 instituting the European Diploma;

Having regard to proposals of the Committee for the Activities of the Council of Europe in the field of biological and landscape diversity (CO-DBP);

Having noted the agreement of the Government of the Russian Federation,

Solemnly awards the European Diploma, Category B, to the Kostomuksha Strict Nature Reserve;

Places the aforesaid zone under the patronage of the Council of the Europe until 18 September 2003;

Attaches the following condition to the award:

1. Draw up a management plan for the whole of the reserve (detailed description, evaluation and short, medium and long-term objectives, plan of action, regular evaluation), within a period of five years;

Attaches the following recommendations to the award:

1. Study the possibilities for extension of the present perimeter of the reserve, taking account of the limits of the hydrographic drainage basin. This extension could lead to the elimination of the frontier strip which at present interrupts the protected area between Finland and Russia; this should be accompanied by a redefinition of the buffer zone surrounding the new perimeter; within this zone the main disturbing activities (logging, hunting, fishing, gathering, etc.) should be strictly regulated and curtailed, or even totally prohibited;

2. Ensure the maintenance of strict regulation to control poaching and tourism; ensure that tourism is exclusively of a scientific and educational nature;

3. Create a visitor centre of an educational nature, intended to disseminate knowledge about the conservation of biological and landscape diversity, and an educational nature trail in the park surrounding the main office building;

4. Increase the human and financial resources of the reserve devoted to research and encourage in particular the pursuit of the studies already begun on recording and monitoring the fauna and flora;

5. Pursue and strengthen the co-operation with the Finnish authorities and in particular with Kainnu Park Area Nature Protection.

APPENDIX II

Draft resolution on the renewal of the European Diploma of Protected Areas to the Kostomuksha Strict Nature Reserve (Russian Federation)

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.a of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Having regard to Resolution (65) 6 instituting the European Diploma, as amended by Resolution (98) 29 on the Regulations for the European Diploma of Protected Areas;

Having regard to Resolution (98) 24 awarding the European Diploma to the Kostomuksha Strict Nature Reserve;

Taking into consideration the expert's report presented at the meeting of the Group of Specialists - European Diploma of Protected Areas on 20 and 21 January 2003;

Having regard to the proposals of the Committee for the Activities of the Council of Europe in the Field of Biological and Landscape Diversity (CO-DBP);

Renews the European Diploma to the Kostomuksha Strict Nature Reserve until 18 September 2008;

Attaches the following conditions to the renewal:

1. prepare or preferably finalise a management plan for the reserve, according to article I.B.4 of Appendix 2 of the Regulations of the European Diploma for Protected Areas, for the next five years;
2. adjust the reserve's south-west boundary to align it with the natural shore of lake Kamennoye.

Attaches the following recommendations to the renewal:

1. consider a request to extend the diploma area, to include the Kalevala national park and the territory between the current western boundary and the border;
2. explore the possibility of removing or adapting the fence located inside the reserve in order to facilitate movements of large animals;
3. create an information centre on the reserve's cultural and natural heritage, as envisaged at Akonlahti;
4. maintain the internal research effort (state and development of biodiversity and landscapes) within the reserve and in conjunction with local universities;
5. step up cooperation with the Finnish authorities, particularly where the reserve's management and facilities are concerned.