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## Paanajarvi and Oulanka National Parks – Russia & Finland

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Paanajarvi National Park, Russia, Oulanka National Park, Finland

Size: c. 130 000 ha, 1,300 sq/km



Participants in coordinating the ongoing transboundary cooperation:

National Government:

- Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation
- Ministry of the Environment of the Republic of Finland

Protected area administration:

- Paanajärvi NP administration in Russia,
- Oulanka NP administration, Finland,
- Parks & Wildlife Finland

Multi-National Corporations:

- EUROPARC transboundary initiative

Local Small Businesses:

- Several businesses and entrepreneurs having partnership with the NP administrations

**Objectives:** Conservation of boreal forests, peatlands, river systems and alluvial meadows, enhancing cultural values and heritage, promoting local livelihoods by developing tourism, providing wilderness experience across the border.

**Values and importance:** Pristine forests, wilderness, uninhabited area, geology, exceptionally large variety of vascular plants, common cultural heritage, key attraction for local tourism business.

**Aspects of transboundary cooperation:** Nature conservation, recreation and tourism, watershed management, scientific monitoring.

**Stage in the process:** Co-operation is in mature stage, official agreements since 1992, a large number of joint projects, harmonized management plans and tourism strategies.

**Date Established:** Co-operation started in 1992 after the designation of Paanajärvi NP by Russian Federation.

**Official Protected Area Designation:** Both are designated as National Parks according to nature conservation legislation. Pre-study for designation for UNESCO World Heritage Site, Oulanka NP is a Ramsar site.

**The Catalyst:** Oulanka NP was established in 1956 and enlarged in 1982 and 1989. Paanajärvi NP designated after the Soviet Union collapse in 1992. Russian and Finnish scientists raised the need for conservation of Paanajärvi area in the 80's and they supported the nomination process of Paanajärvi NP. Half of the Paanajarvi NP area was part of Finland before World War II and there was plenty of scientific information on the values of the area in Finnish archives. One of the justifications for nomination of Paanajarvi NP was the existence of Oulanka NP and their shared natural and cultural values. The First Director of Paanajärvi NP was not experienced in protected area management, and when he got to know that the area is bordering with a Finnish NP he decided to make an

appointment with Finnish colleagues. The outcome from that meeting was a joint wish to develop area together.

**History:** The directors and rangers in both National Parks were personally keen on working together. The Finns had professional knowledge, which was in the very beginning missing in Russian side. For the Oulanka staff Paanajärvi was a laboratory where the services and conservation work started on virgin ground after being a closed border zone for 50 years.

For the Paanajärvi staff Oulanka was the window for experienced NP management and international tourism partnerships. The Lake Paanajärvi area, which is the heart of the Paanajärvi NP, was formerly a Finnish village and thus there were many locals whose roots were on that area and they were willing to participate in NP management and support cultural heritage conservation on both sides. Regional authorities supported the initiative and they were able to allocate international EU funding to the developing projects since Finland joined EU in 1995.

**Barriers, challenges, obstacles, or constraints:** The border between Russia and Finland is closed with special regulations and strict border guarding. Border crossing is possible only at official crossing points, which are located far from the park territory. The living standards were, especially in the beginning, relatively low in Russia compared to Finland. Only some of the staff members can speak and understand neighbours language. The main way of tackling these obstacles has been continuous personal contacts between park management and personnel. Open discussion helps to find the suitable level, forms and measures for co-operation. One should concentrate on those issues where one can really make difference. One cannot fight against windmills. Another important issue is that the parks have together participated in international initiatives, especially under the umbrella of the EUROPARC Federation and earlier as a member of PAN Parks Wilderness network. When you are working in a remote place far from capitals, it is important to meet the colleagues from different countries and regions and to learn from them and to share your own experiences.

### **The Governance and Management Structures**

- **Cooperative relationship:** Formal, non-binding agreement between the Parks; co-operation certified according the EUROPARC Federation scheme “Transboundary Parks – Following Nature’s Design” in 2005 and re-evaluated in 2011 and 2016.
- **Legal basis for cooperation:** No legal base. However, there is an initiative from the Russian Federation in 2013 to formulate an official agreement on government level, but it is still pending. Paanajärvi-Oulanka area is part of the Fennoscandian Green Belt, which is based on the MoU between the Ministry of the Environment of the Republic of Finland, The Ministry of the Environment of the Kingdom of Norway and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation signed on 17 February 2010.

- **Governance structure:** Long-term agreement with vision and objectives, annual work plan, annual management team meetings.
- **Cooperative management arrangement:** Annual work plan, joint projects, including tourism development, species monitoring, staff exchange.

**Results:** Co-operation is now in mature stage; the parks are together more than alone. There are internationally oriented management teams, true friendships, trust, deep interest in developing the services together and sharing the appreciation on the spirit of co-operation with new staff members. The parks together have a reputation as a reliable partner among local and regional communities. Key plans are harmonized and the parks share the same management objectives.

The challenges still include: border formalities, local involvement, how to involve staff member in co-operation at all levels and how to secure continuation when the directors will retire?

**Lessons Learned:** We have focused in the cooperation on concrete measures in our projects, which mean that the results are visible, understandable and communicative. Through international cooperation we have been able to combine local opportunities and international trends together. After all, cooperation is always between people, which means that you need to build long term trust and partnership, and there has to be real willingness to work together. Even though we have a history of war between Russia and Finland behind us, people can find possibilities for co-operation and make their lives more enjoyable and rewarding.

**For More Information:**

<http://www.nationalparks.fi/en/oulankanp>

<http://eng.paanajarvi-park.com/>

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