

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Virgin Komi Forests

Brief description

The Virgin Komi Forests cover 3.28 million ha of tundra and mountain tundra in the Urals, as well as one of the most extensive areas of virgin boreal forest remaining in Europe. This vast area of conifers, aspens, birches, peat bogs, rivers and natural lakes has been monitored and studied for over 50 years. It provides valuable evidence of the natural processes affecting biodiversity in the taiga.

1. Introduction

Year(s) of Inscription **1995**

Agencies responsible for site management

- Ministry of Natural Resources
4/6, Bolsaya Gruzinskaya,
123812 Moscow, Russian Federation
E-mail: mzlv@mnr.gov.ru
Website: www.mnr.gov.ru
- Yugyd Va National Park
- Pechoro-Ilychsky National Wildlife Park

2. Statement of Significance

Inscription Criteria **N (ii), (iii)**

Justification provided by the State Party

The proposed territory meets a number of criteria allowing to consider it to be of the global importance. This area presents a significant habitat of rare and extinct flora and fauna species and a diminishing ecosystem of the virgin forests.

This territory comprises unique geological formations and the places of extreme natural beauty (see slides and the "Inventory" section).

Numerous geological nature monuments and glaciers are the models of the current geological processes.

It is also notable for availability of altitudinal zonality and zonal belts of various types, from the middle taiga to tundra.

In the Uniya basin, there are located the only remained compact settlements of the Komi people and of the Old Believers (a religious sect that was persecuted by Russian authorities in the XXVIIth century).

Since the establishment of the National Park in 1994, over 90 percent of the proposed territory is under long-term juridical and ministerial protection.

As provided in IUCN evaluation

EVALUATION: The Russian European taiga as found in the VKF offers an excellent opportunity to study those natural processes that affect biodiversity in pristine boreal forests. The VKF are indeed special due to their size and natural condition. If fully protected, it would be one of the top five most important natural sites in the boreal forest region (particularly with the WWF project about to start). The area has proved to be important for science and indeed is an unsurpassed natural benchmark for monitoring climatic change and the impacts of the conversion of the boreal forest zone through industrial logging. IUCN thus concludes that the total area, as nominated, meets natural criteria ii and iii.

Unfortunately, approximately 720,000 ha of the originally nominated area is not under adequate legal protection and this portion does not thus satisfy condition of integrity iv. If not given a higher level of protection, activities in both the upper Ilych basin and the area known as LP350 could significantly compromise the integrity of the remaining portion. Another concern is the prospect of the approval of logging permits in the southern buffer zone.

A revised map of the exact boundaries was provided in September 1995. The size of the three components that comprise the nomination are: Pechoro Ilychsky Nature Reserve (730,000 ha); Bufferzone (650,000 ha), and Yugyd-Va National Park (1.9 mil.ha). Total area is thus 3.28 mil.ha.

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Bureau, recognizing that the full site meets criteria ii and iii recommended that the 3 mil. ha of the site that is fully protected as National Park, Zapovednik, and buffer zone could be inscribed. A strong recommendation for action that would allow the remaining 720,000 ha to be incorporated in future was part of this recommendation.

Committee Decision

Bureau (July 1995): The Bureau recommended that the World Heritage Committee inscribe the nominated property on the basis of criteria (ii) and (iii), considering the site among the most important natural sites in the boreal forest region. The site has pristine boreal forests and is an important site for scientific research including climate change. The Bureau however noted, that the Committee should only inscribe 3 million ha of the site which are fully protected as a National Park, Zapovednik and buffer zone. It recommended that the national authorities be strongly encouraged to upgrade the legal status of the remaining 1 million ha and that this area be incorporated in a future nomination. The Bureau raised concerns over the possibility of releasing parts of the area to industrial forestry. It commended the national authorities for their conservation efforts as well as Greenpeace, WWF and the Swiss Government for their assistance in strengthening the management of this area.

Session (1995): The Committee inscribed the nominated property on the basis of criteria (ii) and (iii), considering the site among the most important natural sites in the boreal forest region.

The site has pristine boreal forests and is an important site for scientific research including climate change. The Committee decided to inscribe an area of 3.28 million ha, which is fully protected as a National Park, Zapovednik and buffer zone. It requested the Centre to write to the national authorities to encourage them to upgrade the legal status of an additional 700,000 ha so that this adjacent area could be incorporated in the site. It furthermore commended the national authorities for their conservation efforts as well as those of Greenpeace, WWF and the Swiss Government for their assistance in strengthening the management of this area.

- Statement of Significance adequately defines the outstanding universal value of the site
- No change required by State Party
- UNESCO's official description is not satisfactory

Boundaries and Buffer Zone

- Status of boundaries of the site: adequate
- Buffer zone: adequate
- No change to buffer zone has been proposed by State Party

Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- World Heritage site values have not been maintained. There have not been any significant changes to the authenticity/integrity of the property since inscription

3. Protection**Legislative and Administrative Arrangements**

- Federal Law "On the Specially Protected Natural Areas"
- Regulations of the "Yugyd Va" National Park and "Pechoro-Ilychsky National Wildlife Park"; Decree of the Head of the Komi Republic n°350 (1996) "On the Republic's programme for the support of the Pechoro-Ilychsky National Wildlife Biosphere Park", Resolutions "On Biosphere Range" and "On Buffer Zone" of the Zapovednik
- The protection arrangements are considered as insufficiently effective

Actions taken/proposed:

- Establishment of the federal agency responsible for the management of all natural protected areas
- Coordination Board of the National Park has been set up on regional level

4. Management**Use of site/property**

- Visitor attraction, national park

Management /Administrative Body

- Steering group has been legally set up in 1994
- Site manager on full-time basis
- Levels of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: national, regional, local
- State Party considers the current management system is highly effective

5. Management Plan

- No management plan
- Responsibility for over-seeing the implementation of the management plan and monitoring its effectiveness: Ministry of Natural Resources; Federal Natural Resources Management Service (Rosprirodnadzor)

6. Financial Resources**Financial situation**

- State Budget: not provided

- WHF: N/A
- Bi-lateral: Grant from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service
- Funding is insufficient

7. Staffing Levels

- Number of staff: not provided

Rate of access to adequate professional staff across the following disciplines:

- Good: education, visitor management
- Average: conservation, management, promotion, interpretation

8. Sources of Expertise and Training in Conservation and Management Techniques

- Scientific institutions: not provided
- Museum conservation facilities: not provided
- No training available on site management

9. Visitor Management

- Visitor statistics: 8,277 visitors in 2004
- Visitor facilities: site museum, elk farm, ecological camps, guides, forest reception centres
- Visitor needs: poor tourist, transport and communication infrastructure; lack of skilled guides

10. Scientific Studies

- Ecological monitoring projects; creation of inventory and databases; geo-botanical researches; Earth crust studies; archaeological and ethnographical researches; project "Observation of phenomena and processes in the Zapovenik's natural complex and their study under *Nature Records* programme"
- Production of information and promotional materials
- Study "Yugyd Va as the World Heritage property: a concept"

11. Education, Information and Awareness Building

- Inadequate number of signs referring to World Heritage site
- World Heritage Convention Emblem is not used on publications

- Adequate awareness of World Heritage among: local communities, businesses, local authorities
- Need for awareness raising: funding for the production of the information/promotional materials to be raised
- No web site available
- Local participation: the projects aimed at involvement of local communities were drafted

12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)

Reactive monitoring reports

- World Heritage Bureau sessions: 21st (1997); 22nd (1998)
- World Heritage Committee sessions: 21st (1997); 22nd (1998)

Conservation interventions

- Conservation, restoration works: not provided
- Present state of conservation: Good

Threats and Risks to site

- Natural disasters; tourism pressure; threats due to the mining of mineral resources and gas transportation
- Regional authorities of Komi Republic decided to revise the boundaries of the World Heritage property and weaken its area (Resolution n°206, 2004) so that the private enterprises could recommence goldmining works
- Emergency measures taken: not provided

13. Monitoring

- Formal monitoring programme is focused on the following themes: climate, phenology, terrestrial vertebrates, abundance dynamics, state of spawning population of Atlantic salmon of Upper Pechora and other fish species, productivity of main forest-constituent wood species, wild berry fields and mushrooms
- Measures taken/planned: not provided

14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions

- Main benefits of WH status: conservation, management
- Strengths of management: own revenues of the National Park raised; number of scientific and methodological studies have been carried out; international cooperation established; number of awareness-raising projects implemented;

young and dynamic staff appointed in the National Park

- Weaknesses of management: lack of policies to prevent the negative impact of the development pressure; no management plan exists; weak management system; no protective regime defined for the buffer zone; lack of funding; no training on site management available; incomplete inventory

Future actions:

- Preparation of the management plan