

NordMAB session - planning cooperation

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Everyone except for Daniel Thorell and Jan Svensson wants to stay in contact and continue the work after the conference

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Background and program

NordMAB session at EuroMAB 2011 was organized to plan future Nordic cooperation and biosphere reserve visibility in the North.

MAB-programme includes regional and thematic networks established for exchange of experiences and cooperation between the Biosphere Reserves. One of these semi-official networks is the NordMaB. Co-operation under the name of NordMAB was started between Nordic and the Baltic Sea Region countries in the beginning of 2000; also Northwest Russian BRs bordering the Nordic and Baltic countries were invited.

The activities between Nordic BRs have been sporadic. Some projects have been arranged and regions have built their own contacts within NordMAB- network. During 2005-2007 some BR:s along the Baltic Coast were sharing experiences in a Interreg -project called Coastal Sustainability as a challenge. In February 2011 there was a meeting arranged in the Archipelago Sea Area, in Turku, Finland, in connection with a Nordic Sustainable development conference "Solutions".

During the coming decade many new Biosphere Reserves will be established in the Nordic countries and Baltic Sea Region and opportunities for NordMAB network seem to be increase fast.

The agenda for NordMAB session in the EuroMAB 2011 conference was based on the recommendations from earlier meetings. The main focus was to discuss the structure, profile and tools for communication for the network and update the recommendations from NordMAB conference in Latvia 2004 . The participants were asked to give suggestions for the agenda in the conference internet site before the meeting.

Issues presented for a draft agenda:

- How to present the network? What are the strengths of the BR:s in NordMAB? The profile of the network?
- Where and when should the network be visible?
- Revision of recommendations from the NordMAB Conference 2004
- Digital portal for communication and sharing experiences

Material distributed on the internet site:

- Recommendations from Latvia 2004
 - Minutes from meeting in February 2011 in Turku, Finland.
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Summary of the discussions and commitments

Session was opened by Timo J. Hokkanen, moderator for the session and coordinator for North Karelia Biosphere Reserve in Finland. The session started with an introduction of everyone. The participants were both BR managers and other kind of representatives for the BR:s. There was a wide diversity of backgrounds consistin, e.g., researchers, administration and BR personnel.

Katja Bonnevier gave a short view back for the NordMAB network.

- *NordMAB cooperation discussed at several other MAB meetings*
- *Meeting in Helsinki 2003*
- *Meeting in Stockholm March 2004. – Application for Nordic Council of Ministers*
- *Conference in Latvia October 2004 – evaluation of Nordic BR:s and cooperation*
- *Coastal Sustainability as a challenge – Interreg project 2005-2007*
- *Meeting in Turku at the Nordic Conference for Sustainable Development - February 2011*

The moderator presented for discussion the basic structure for the network that was decided about in Latvia. The session decided that there should not be any strict borders for the network, since it is an informal network. The informal network is created for cooperation between BR:s in Nordic countries. The name had been decided to be NordMAB in Latvia 2004 and was still seen being a proper one. The participants saw several reasons to cooperate with other Nordic countries, like sharing similar important environmental and developmental issues and for some of the countries also some financial instruments, like funds in connection with the Nordic Council of Ministers. The network was seen as important for new-comers that need some good examples of how to become a BR. The interest to have a Steering Group was dividing the people, but in the end it was decided that informal working groups would be a better option.

Focus points of NordMAB from Latvia 2004 were presented, because the meeting in Turku 2011 had decided to update them.

Focus points:

- Administration and organization
- National legislation
- Zonation
- Local acceptance and effect on economical development
- Convention for biodiversity,
- Nordic cooperation.

The participants were asked to vote for 3 of the existing focus points or on some new additional ones. The participants were maybe not enough familiar with the previous work and neither the background for the perspectives of the NordMAB, so there was some confusion about the relevance of creating a NordMAB profile with common issues of interest.

Many of the participants rather see NordMAB as a platform for finding partners for cooperation than working together as a network. The focus points were seen as not up-to-date and because of the confusion there was not any interest to vote for them. The session did not get to the point where the profile could be discussed or any thematics for cooperation. The participants wanted more time to think about possibilities and interest for cooperation. Still tourism was suggested as an important

issue for cooperation in the Nordic countries. And later some more issues like environmental awareness and water issues in connection with Baltic Action Plan were mentioned. A brain-storming about project-ideas was suggested, but not decided about in the end. Some further information and possible interest to cooperate within the Green Belt of Fennoscandia was mentioned by Lapland BR, but the discussion was postponed to after the meeting.

Instead the future meetings and the web-platform for NordMAB was planned and Christian Bouchard/Canada offered kindly to be responsible for the platform and possibly also a facebook site, since it can be connected with the planning of EuroMAB 2013. Timo Hokkanen/Finland offered to be responsible for next meeting in 2012 in connection with the 20th anniversary of North Karelia BR and Canada for a NordMAB meeting in connection with EuroMAB 2013. For planning the meetings there should always be committees. And the web-platform open for comments seems not to be an adequate method. There was also suggested a continuation of participation in the Nordic conference for Sustainable Development in 2012 in Umeå/Sweden. The participants of the conference in Turku/Finland 2011 were very pleased with the involvement of the MAB-program in the conference. It gave the program and the Nordic Biosphere Reserves visibility outside own networks and interchange of ideas with other programs and organizations. For being involved in the conference in Umeå 2013 someone should be in contact with the organizers from the early stages of the planning, and that should preferably be the closest BR in Sweden or the national committee of Sweden.

A list of members is needed and Katja Bonnevier will send that to everyone.

Conclusions

This was a good possibility for a small network to meet as an integrated program of a bigger conference, both now at the EuroMAB conference and earlier at the Nordic Conference for sustainable development. This is a question about economy and time, but also a question about visibility and interactions outside the network. At the session there were 19 participants (+2 organizers) from 6 countries. Two of the countries have not participated before and have not been included in the mailing lists for NordMAB. Almost everyone was interested to be in contact and involved in the NordMAB network in the future.

During the session many issues considering the basic structure and the purpose of the network was discussed. The session didn't achieve the planned main goals (deciding the main topics to start working with), but produced some concrete ideas about the future communication. It turned out to be very difficult to continue the work from where we left it last time. There were only a few participants that have been involved in any activities of NordMAB earlier, and that made it difficult to advance with any plans from previous meetings. Discussions about the basic frameworks were time consuming and the 2 hours available for the workshop was not enough for a meeting. For future similar occasions is recommended that the workshop is focused on some concrete thematic issue

important for the Nordic cooperation and the participants are introduced to the network beforehand. The framework of the network should be clear for all and all participating Biosphere Reserves should have a contact person who can introduce others possible participants to the previous work.

A positive conclusion is though that there is interest and willingness to continue the development of the NordMAB network and cooperation between regions with a Nordic environmental and cultural perspective. Nordic is now in this occasion as much as possible extended to include except for the Nordic countries, also other regions in the Northwest Russia and Canada. This gives the network more options for resources to work with, but also more, e.g., logistic challenges.