

Recent Activity

Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting

Kiruna Sweden

15th May 2013

Documents Released:

- The Arctic Biodiversity Assessment (largest assessment to date)
- Arctic Ocean Review
- Arctic Ocean Acidification Assessment
- Arctic Resilience Interim Report

Global Biodiversity Agenda

Arctic Region

An introduction to Regional Organisation

The Arctic Council

The Arctic Council is a high-level, inter-governmental forum to provide a means for promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic states, Arctic Indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues especially issues of sustainable development and environmental protection. The Arctic Council has six working groups which are composed of representatives from sectoral ministries, government agencies and research institutes. These groups cover a variety of fields including emergency prevention and Arctic biodiversity.



Arctic Council Composition

Arctic Member States

Canada; Denmark (representing Greenland and the Faroe Islands); Finland; Iceland; Norway; Russia; Sweden; and The United States of America.

Permanent Participants

Arctic Athabaskan Council (AAC); Aleut International Association (AIA); Gwich'in Council International (GGI); Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC); Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON); and Saami Council (SC).

Conservation of Arctic Fauna and Flora (CAFF)

CAFF is the biodiversity working group of the Arctic Council. CAFF's mandate is to address the conservation of Arctic biodiversity, and to communicate its findings to the governments and residents of the Arctic, helping to promote practices which ensure the sustainability of the Arctic's living resources. The Arctic Biodiversity Assessment was released at the Arctic Council Meeting in May.

Conservation and economic development requires comprehensive baseline data including the status and trends of Arctic biodiversity, habitats and ecosystem health. The Circumpolar Biodiversity Monitoring Programme (CBMP) CAFF is developing a mechanism to create and use a baseline of current knowledge for use in dynamic assessments.

Nine Key Findings of the Arctic Biodiversity Assessment (CAFF 2013)

1. **Arctic biodiversity is being degraded**, but decisive action taken now can help sustain vast, relatively undisturbed ecosystems of tundra, mountains, fresh water and seas and the valuable services they provide
2. **Climate change** is by far the **most serious threat to Arctic biodiversity** and exacerbates all other threats.
3. Many Arctic **migratory species are threatened** by overharvest and habitat alteration **outside the Arctic**, especially birds along the East Asian flyway.
4. **Disturbance and habitat degradation** can **diminish** Arctic biodiversity and the opportunities for Arctic residents and visitors to enjoy the benefits of **ecosystem services**.
5. **Pollution** from both long-range transport and local sources **threatens the health of Arctic species** and ecosystems.
6. There are **currently few invasive alien species in the Arctic**, but more are expected with climate change and increased human activity.
7. **Overharvest** was historically the primary human impact on many Arctic species, but **sound management** has **successfully addressed this problem** in most, but not all, cases.
8. **Current knowledge** of many Arctic species, ecosystems and their stressors is **fragmentary**, making detection and assessment of trends and their implications difficult for many aspects of Arctic biodiversity.
9. The **challenges** facing Arctic biodiversity are **interconnected**, requiring comprehensive solutions and **international cooperation**.



Wilderness & Protected Areas

The Arctic region is one of the last remaining wild areas, unfragmented and undisturbed by permanent physical man-made structure, such as roads, railways, power lines or pipelines. Of the largest ten wilderness areas globally, seven were located in the Arctic region. The largest wilderness in the Arctic was Northern Siberia with 2.8 million square kilometres (Lysenko & Zöckler 2001).

Protected Areas are a key to biodiversity conservation and are the focus of Aichi Target 11 which seeks to increase protected area coverage (see The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 of the Convention on Biological Diversity).

Terrestrial protected areas provide a considerable contribution to Arctic biodiversity conservation

The Arctic is globally well represented from a global perspective with 11% covered by protected areas (Barry and McLennan 2010). However, there is variable protection of the wilderness areas. The largest protected area, North East Greenland, along with other sites, cumulatively protects 41% of Greenland the third largest wilderness area in the Arctic. At the other extreme only 3.9% of Chukotka wilderness area is protected (Lysenko & Zöckler 2001).

Engagement of local communities in monitoring and conservation work is increasing which shows that the vital basis of local support for protection of the environment is starting to be generated (CAFF 2013).

However, the increasing race for Arctic resources puts enormous pressure on the remaining wilderness areas. For example the Yamal Peninsula in Arctic Russia, previously listed as the 11 largest wilderness area (Lysenko & Zöckler 2001), now no longer qualifies as wilderness because of the level of infrastructure present. The Yamal peninsula currently produces 17% of the world's natural gas and, in 2010 roads, railways and pipelines fragmented the site further. While the physical footprint of the gas fields remains small, its pipelines and other facilities have blocked two of the four main Nenets (nomadic reindeer herders) migration routes, damaged grazing areas and closed access to 18 traditional camping grounds (Maynard *et al*, 2009).

Fragmentation of Arctic habitat can interrupt the hydrology, destroying the fragile slow-growing tundra vegetation; endanger ecosystems; and prevent the passage of migrating caribou and reindeer.

More than 40% of protected areas in the Arctic have a coastal component

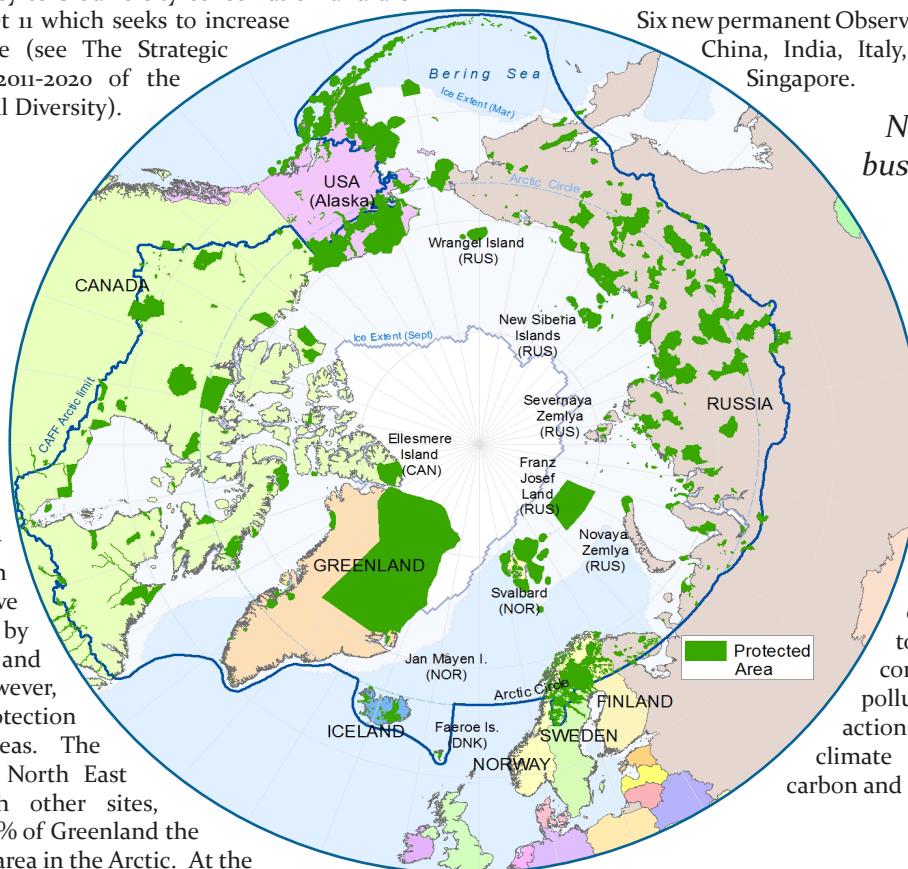
Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting 2013: Kiruna Sweden

During the Ministerial Meeting, held in May 2013, Arctic Ministers signed the Kiruna Declaration, Vision for the Arctic. In addition, several scientific assessments and reports by the working groups, task forces, and expert groups of the Arctic Council were also approved including Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic and the Arctic Biodiversity Assessment policy recommendations.

Six new permanent Observer countries were approved: China, India, Italy, Japan, South Korea and Singapore.

New circumpolar business forum to be established

Canada took over the chairmanship of the Arctic Council from Sweden at the meeting. During the Canadian Chairmanship, the Arctic Council program will include the establishment of a Circumpolar Business Forum to provide new opportunities for business to engage with the Council; continued work on oil pollution prevention; and action to address short-lived climate pollutants such as black carbon and methane.



Ocean Acidification

Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP) released the Arctic Ocean Acidification Assessment at the Arctic Council Meeting (AMAP 2013). Ocean acidification is the increase in the acidity (lowering of the pH) of the sea caused by the uptake of CO₂ from the atmosphere. The higher the concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere, the more is absorbed by marine waters resulting in acidification. It affects many marine organisms. Those with calcium shells are directly affected which could cause whole ecosystem modification. The Arctic Ocean is particularly vulnerable to ocean acidification because of the large quantities of freshwater it receives and sea ice reductions exposing larger areas of the surface to the air.



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