National Parks, Outdoor Life and Health

Nordic Conference, Hotel Skaftafell, Freysnes, Iceland
5-7 May 2005

National Parks, Outdoor Life and Health

Nordic Conference, Hotel Skaftafell, Freysnes, Iceland 5-7 May 2005

TemaNord 2006:513

© Nordic Council of Ministers, Copenhagen 2005

ISBN 92-893-1282-3

Print: Ekspresen Tryk & Kopicenter

Cover photo: Eystrahorn, South East Iceland, Johann Isberg

Copies: 150

Printed on environmentally friendly paper

This publication can be ordered on www.norden.org/order. Other Nordic publications are available at www.norden.org/publications

Printed in Denmark

Nordic Council of Ministers

Store Strandstræde 18

DK-1255 Copenhagen K

Phone (+45) 3396 0200

Fax (+45) 3396 0202

Nordic Council

Store Strandstræde 18

DK-1255 Copenhagen K

Phone (+45) 3396 0400

Fax (+45) 3311 1870

www.norden.org

Nordic Environmental Co-operation

The Nordic Environmental Action Plan 2005-2008 forms the framework for the Nordic countries' environmental co-operation both within the Nordic region and in relation to the adjacent areas, the Arctic, the EU and other international forums. The programme aims for results that will consolidate the position of the Nordic region as the leader in the environmental field. One of the overall goals is to create a healthier living environment for the Nordic people.

Nordic co-operation

Nordic co-operation, one of the oldest and most wide-ranging regional partnerships in the world, involves Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. Co-operation reinforces the sense of Nordic community while respecting national differences and similarities, makes it possible to uphold Nordic interests in the world at large and promotes positive relations between neighbouring peoples.

Co-operation was formalised in 1952 when *the Nordic Council* was set up as a forum for parliamentarians and governments. The Helsinki Treaty of 1962 has formed the framework for Nordic partnership ever since. The *Nordic Council of Ministers* was set up in 1971 as the formal forum for co-operation between the governments of the Nordic countries and the political leadership of the autonomous areas, i.e. the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland.

Content

Preface.....	7
Summary: Main points raised	9
1. Central issues – introductory lectures	11
1.1 Conservation issues	12
1.2 Health issues.....	15
1.3 Economic issues	16
2. Evening program	19
3. Sharing experiences.....	23
3.1 The National Park Project in Denmark.....	23
3.2 Sustainable nature tourism in Syöte National Park, Finland.....	24
3.3 Carrying capacity of protected areas in Iceland.....	25
3.4 Nordic-Baltic network of protected areas.....	26
3.5 Outdoor recreation policy in Norway	27
3.6 Maintenance and promotion of the local cultural heritage.....	28
4. Reports from groups	31
4.1 Obstacles and opportunities in protected areas and national parks in densely populated areas.....	31
4.2 The role of the local community in the development and management of protected areas and national parks.....	32
4.3 How can we help visitors to understand and appreciate the wonders of nature in national parks and protected areas (nature interpretation)?	34
4.4 How can national parks and protected areas best be used for outdoor activities, in order to meet the objectives to improve human health, without spoiling the natural heritage?	37
4.5 Theory and practice in the management and physical planning of national parks.....	41
Sammenfatning.....	43
Appendix A: Program.....	43
Appendix B: List of participants.....	49
Appendix C: Presentation by Vigdís Finnbogadóttir	51

Preface

The conference on National Parks, Outdoor Life and Health was a product of the Icelandic Presidency in the Nordic Council in 2004. The theme of Iceland's Presidency was "Nordic Resources: Democracy – Nature – Culture". A special emphasis was placed on national parks and protected areas, the economic value of such areas and their importance for recreation and public health.

More than 100 people participated in the conference. In addition to participants from Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, the Faeroe Islands and Greenland, people from Latvia, Lithuania, Scotland and Canada attended the conference. Participants represented both the public sector and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). This mixture of public sector and NGO representatives was intended from the beginning since one of the goals of the conference was to create a forum for a dialogue between NGOs and the public sector.

The conference started with a session where central issues were introduced. This session included three presentations focusing respectively on conservation issues, nature and health and the economic value of protected areas. Group discussions took place in the afternoon of the first day, but the day concluded with an evening session where two special guests of honour spoke about matters related to the topic of the conference. Those guests were Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, former president of Iceland, who talked about Nordic Natural Heritage, and Dr. Jack D. Ives who showed photos and talked about Icelandic nature in the domain of Vatnajökull.

The second day of the conference began with a morning session where participants shared experiences from their home countries. The session consisted of eight short talks: two from Denmark, two from Finland, two from Norway, one from Iceland and one from Lithuania. This was immediately followed by results from group discussions, which had taken place the day before, and the conference ended with general discussions and concluding remarks from the conference chairs.

One of the main points raised by the conference participants was the need to create an active dialog between those working in nature conservation and those working on public health issues. The conference organising committee suggests that this aspect be looked into more closely by the Nordic Council of Ministers as a worthy future project.

This conference report summarizes the main points of the presentations and gives results from group discussions. Those who are interested in more detailed information on individual presentation can visit the conference website (<http://www.landvernd.is/natureconference/>) where they

can access the slides or text of many of the presentations from the conference.

The Organizing Committee for the conference consisted of: *Kristín Linda Árnadóttir*, chairman, Icelandic Ministry for the Environment. *Árni Bragason*, the Environment and Food Agency of Iceland. *Árni Finnson*, Iceland Nature Conservation Association (INCA) who represented the NGO sector. *Tryggvi Felixson* and *Rannveig Thoroddsen*, at Landvernd, the Icelandic Environment Association, were responsible for planning and logistics. *Auður H Ingólfssdóttir*, environmental consultant at Environice was a report writer and editor. *Magnús Jóhannesson*, Secretary General of the Icelandic Ministry for the Environment and *Katrín Eymundsdóttir*, municipal government of Kelduneshreppur in Iceland, were conference chairs.

Kristín Linda Árnadóttir,
Chairman of the Organizing Committee

Auður H Ingólfssdóttir,
Report Editor

Summary: Main points raised

The conference consisted of a session with central themes, case studies and group discussions. During the lectures and discussions several themes emerged as ongoing threads throughout the conference.

Think big but flexible – Many of those with presentations had a clear preference for protecting large coherent areas, rather than bits and pieces here and there, but proposed different levels of protection within those larger areas. Most also emphasized the importance of managing these areas to make them accessible for people, rather than trying to keep people out. Furthermore, it should not necessarily be a precondition that no humans live within the limits of protected areas and that all protected land needs to be state-owned, as has been the tendency in the past.

The involvement of stakeholders and local people – This was definitely a common thread throughout the conference. Heavy emphasis was placed on demographic approaches in many presentations as well as group discussions. It was pointed out that involving many stakeholders with different interests could certainly be a very tedious and time consuming process. Nevertheless, this was deemed absolutely necessary and seen as helping to prevent deeper conflicts in the future. Moreover, regarding the question of conflict resolution, it was suggested that training protection area staff in mediation and conflict resolution could be a very useful investment.

Education and public awareness – Teaching people to respect and understand nature is one role of protected areas and this point was brought up several times during the conference. Nature interpretation was the topic of one group discussion and the importance of increasing awareness came up in other groups as well. Also, it was pointed out that it was not enough to inform; behaviour needed to be changed. “How do we touch the feelings of the person in the jeep, not only the purist?” was a question asked from the floor.

The importance of protected areas for public health – A final common thread apparent throughout the conference was the importance of protected areas for public health. However, some participants felt this issue had not been discussed enough and needed further consideration in future conferences. For instance, almost all participants came from the environment and nature conservation sector (both participants from the public sector and NGOs), but very few from the public health sector. Creating an active dialogue between those working in nature conservation and those working on public health issues was suggested as a possible future task for the Nordic Council of Ministers.

1. Central issues

– introductory lectures

The importance of looking at recreation and nature conservation as compatible goals rather than opposites was a common thread in all lectures of this first session of the conference. The trend in recent years has been to move away from narrow definitions of protected areas, where the focus was only on nature and biodiversity, to a broader definition where cultural and economic issues are also taken into consideration.

Sigríður Anna Þórðardóttir, Minister for the Environment, Iceland, emphasized the importance of involving local communities in the management of national parks in her opening address for the conference. “It will be particularly interesting to learn from your experiences during this conference how you have succeeded in integrating local interests into the management of national parks,” she said.

The Minister went on to introduce the Icelandic Government’s ideas to expand the national park in Skaftafell. In November of 2004 the park was tripled in size when the Icelandic Government decided to incorporate the southern part of the Vatnajökull icecap and the Lakagígar area into the park. This action was only an initial step since future plans aim to include the whole icecap in the national park, which would add another 3,000 square kilometres to the area. The Ministry for the Environment has also been examining the possibility of protecting, as a national park, the area north of the icecap all the way to the coast in Öxarfjörður, which is a total area of 7,000 square kilometres. “This area is exceptional and is unique in the world with regard to the diversity of geological formations and landscape and is typical for interactions between the volcanic activity in the area and the glacier. The area also includes the river Jökulsá á Fjöllum with the famous waterfall Dettifoss. The river has played a very significant role in the forming of the landscape north of Vatnajökull,” said the Minister. She also informed the audience that there was a general support for this project among all political parties and most stakeholders. Last January, the Icelandic Government accepted a proposal from the Minister for the Environment to continue preparations for the establishment of the large Vatnajökull National Park.

1.1 Conservation issues

Peter Agger, professor at the Department of Environment, Technology and Social Studies at the Roskilde University, Denmark talked about the development of conservation: measures and the design of protected areas over time, from Nordic as well as global perspectives. He looked at the concept of national parks in a broad context and emphasized the need for a common understanding of definitions of what a protected area is.

Agger pointed out that conservation is not only about preserving, but also involves maintenance, management and monitoring. Conservation can be approached from many angles. Some conservation is species oriented or process oriented but the approach to conserve nature by establishing protected areas such as national parks is an area-oriented approach.

“We are moving from a narrow to a broader definition of protected areas. To begin with, the focus was only on nature and biological diversity, but later also on cultural and economic issues,” Agger stated. He also said the trend was to protect larger areas, rather than many smaller ones and provided some arguments for this policy. One reason for larger protection areas is that we want to protect the web of interactions (ecosystems) rather than only specific elements of nature.

The presentation reminded the audience that conservation in some form has existed for as long as humans have. The first national parks were established in North America more than a century ago. As early as 1972 the IUCN began developing guidelines for how to define protected areas. These were reviewed in 1978 and again in 2004. The IUCN classification used today lists six types of protected areas:

- Strict protection (Strict Reserve or Wilderness)
- Ecosystem conservation and protection (i.e. National Park)
- Conservation of natural features (National Monuments)
- Conservation through active management (i.e. Habitat/Species Management Area)
- Landscape conservation and recreation (i.e. Protected Landscapes/Seascapes)
- Sustainable use of natural resources (i.e. Managed Resource Protected Area)

Agger explained that over time definitions of national parks have become more flexible. Previously, human settlements were completely excluded from national parks but today this is accepted as something that could be included. Furthermore, land used for national parks is no longer required to be public land and there is increased awareness of the rights of indigenous people. The idea of sustainable development is also increasingly becoming part of the discussion about protected areas and national parks.

Agger said some were sceptical of this emphasis on integrating principles of sustainable development into discussion about protected areas but he had faith in this process. In the future he said it was necessary to focus more on bottom-up approaches, involving people at the grass-root level.

Árni Finnson, *Iceland Nature Conservation Association*, gave a presentation on the current status and progress of conservation policies in Iceland. He opened up his talk with a reference to a Swedish poem praising open landscape. We as humans search for what is unique and unusual and Árni pointed out how in Sweden some people long for open spaces while in Iceland people often search for areas with trees to escape the wind.

Árni gave a short historical overview of environmental policy in Iceland since World War II. The first wave of conservation activism in Iceland rose around 1970 and many environmental NGOs were established around this time. In 1980s the whaling debate was at the forefront internationally and Árni said that, in his opinion, this debate set Icelandic nature conservation discussion back a few decades. It was not until in the late 1990s that a second wave of activism began.

Icelandic conservation policies have been influenced from abroad and Árni gave several examples of foreign input. "Without foreign input we would not be where we are today," he said and referred to Peter Scott visiting Thjórsárver in the 1950s, the role the WWF played in establishing Skaftafell National Park in 1967 and the Breidafjörður Marine Protected Area some decades later. He also mentioned the involvement of foreign scientists at Lake Mývatn and a few other examples.

Iceland is a resource-based economy and conservation has often focused mainly on reforestation and soil conservation. Foreign NGO activity has often been seen as a threat, mainly as a consequence of the whaling conflict according to Árni. Perhaps because of this view, urban environmentalism is fairly recent in Iceland. Several things happened in the late 1990s that prompted a second wave of activism in nature conservation. These events included a new aluminum plant in Hvalfjörður, physical planning for the central highlands, plans to sink the Eyjabakkar delta and the Kárahnjúkar hydropower project, to name a few. Árni also refers to the Master Plan for Hydro and Geothermal Energy Resources in Iceland which he said was a stellar work on conservation but the problem was it had no legal or formal governance status.

Finally, Árni gave his view on the environmental threats facing Iceland currently. He mentioned things like habitat or ecosystem destruction, introduction to foreign species, hydropower development, ignorance, erosion, destruction of corals and marine pollution. The biggest threat in his mind, however, was climate change. "I think climate change will be the most important issue in Iceland in the next 10-20 years," he said.

Roger Croft, *from Scotland and the IUCN WCPA Regional Vice-Chair Europe*, gave a talk titled "Conservation and recreation in protected ar-

eas: Reconciling opposites?” He began the talk by asking if recreation and nature were opposites and said the answer depended on how people viewed recreation and nature conservation. “The answer is “yes” if you are a died-in-the-wool preservationist or a recreation activist believing nature is to be tamed and conquered. The answer is “no” if you signed up to the Durban Accord and recognize values and benefits of protected areas for all of society now and in the future,” Croft said. He went on to read out the Durban Accord which he said was a new paradigm for protected areas:

“In this changing world, we need a fresh and innovative approach to protected areas and their role in broader conservation and development agendas. This approach demands the maintenance and enhancement of our core conservation goals, equitably integrating them with the interests of all affected people. In this way the synergy between conservation, the maintenance of life support systems and sustainable development is forged. We see protected areas as vital means to achieve this synergy efficiently and cost-effectively. We see protected areas as providers of benefits beyond boundaries – beyond their boundaries on a map, beyond the boundaries of nation-states, across societies, genders and generations.”

Croft stated his belief that if people work together on those issues progress will be made. He used Thingvellir as an example to demonstrate his point. Thingvellir is a place with a platonic rift and people used to argue there. But it can also be seen as a meeting place where people came together to exchange ideas.

The ingredients of success, according to Scott, are an all-inclusive package of action:

1. Develop multiple objectives
2. Assess opportunities and constraints
3. Implement management on the ground
4. Devise use and capacity constraints
5. Develop a formal plan
6. Use external appraisal
7. Implement the process of engagement
8. Implement modern governance

After introducing the list Croft discussed each item and gave some examples of how to implement these action items. For example, when developing multiple objectives, it was necessary to look at not only ecological health and integrity, but also at aesthetic and spiritual values as well as tangible use values such as recreation, access, ecotourism activities and supporting infrastructure.

Reconciling conflicts between stakeholders is one of the most critical issues when establishing and managing protected areas according to Croft. “This is a long and hard, but absolutely necessary process,” he said

and emphasized the importance of training managers of protected areas in mediation and conflict resolution.

1.2 Health issues

Peter Schantz, from the University College for Physical Education and Sports in Stockholm, Sweden, gave a talk he called "An Holistic Approach to Landscapes and Health." Schantz began his presentation by stating that both psychosocial and physical health trends were pointing in the wrong direction. He had data supporting this statement that showed the increase in adult obesity and how this was followed by an increase in diseases related to overweight such as diabetes. One way to counteract obesity is to increase physical activity. It was in this context that Schantz asked the question: Can nature be a supportive environment for health?

Schantz said he had looked at how nature could possibly affect health from three perspectives. First, he talked about how the experience of nature could influence the mental state of those participating in the research. The research team found four possible ways in which nature affects participants: reduces fear in stressed subjects, blocks or reduces stressful thoughts, fosters restoration from anxiety or stress and sustains interest and attention. The research compared the stress levels of urban pedestrians in traffic and in green areas. Schantz said it was clear that nature could help reduce stress levels but many questions remained. For example, can we get the same benefits from urban settings e.g. in parks, back yard etc.? Also, the research was conducted in green nature, but it would be interesting to see if the same applied in other kinds of nature, e.g. open spaces with rocks, snow and so on.

The second perspective was to look at nature as an external factor in relation to physical activity. "Existing evidence indicates that in Sweden, nature is the most preferred arena for physical activity," Schantz said. He told the conference about a study he did on the effects of physical activities on health, by monitoring changes in a group that participated in a one-week cross country skiing tour. There were some changes in muscles, metabolic rates and other physical benefits. Schantz asked the question if the positive effects of such a week could be stored and used at other times. Although some mental effects such as the memory of the trip could last longer, most of the physical benefits will not last unless physical activity continues. The problem with many outdoor areas is that they are far away from urban settings. Green areas close to where people live are therefore very important because they can use them in their everyday lives. The conclusion Schantz drew from this was that nature could help people support health, but often nature was displaced from urban areas. Therefore, integration of natural areas into urban centres is very important.

Activities in Sweden's nature. Photo: Ulf Silvander

The third perspective Schantz looked at was whether nature helped people gaining a sense of coherence. He informed the audience that more than 72% of Swedes agree with the following statement: "Being in nature gives me contact with the coherence of the existence and therefore I like to be out in nature."

Schantz finished his presentation by saying that his conclusion was that nature could be a supportive environment for health in four ways. It could be stimulating to a psychological well-being, it was the preferred arena for physical activity, it was most likely stimulating to enhanced levels of physical activity and it stimulated a sense of coherence.

1.3 Economic issues

Kristin Magnussen, who works for KM Miljøutredningen in Norway gave a presentation on the economic value of protected areas. She said that protected areas could provide non-marketable services to human society and explained how economists had tried to estimate the value of those services in monetary terms.

Ecosystem services can include things such as biological resources, soil fertility, hydrological services and ecological services such as pollination and filtration. Protected areas can also provide an area for recreation and be a tourist attraction because of scenic beauty. When trying to estimate the economic value of such services two questions come to

mind. First, is it “right” from a moral point of view to estimate nature services in monetary terms? Secondly, do we have good enough methods to estimate nature services in monetary terms?

Magnussen said the original motivation for environmental valuation was to include the environmental impact in cost-benefit analysis. This was considered necessary to emphasize the fact that nature and natural services were important. When economists try to estimate the value of nature they aim at capturing the so called “total value” of an environmental good. Total value can be divided into four types of values: Use value, existence value, option value and quasi option value. Use values arise from the actual and/or planned use of a service and existence value comes from the knowledge that the services exist, regardless of whether an individual is using this service or planning to use it. An option value relates to willingness to pay to guarantee the availability of the service for future use. Quasi option value relates to willingness to pay to avoid irreversible commitment to development now, given the expectation of future growth in knowledge relevant to the implication of development. The total value is the value of those four values added together.

Several methods exist to capture the monetary value of services which nature and landscape provide. Magnusson mentioned methods such as contingent valuation, travel cost and contingent ranking. Valuation studies have been used to relate to decisions on whether to protect waterfalls, old growth forests and special species, to name a few examples. Magnusson stressed that economic valuation and cost benefit analysis can only be one input into decision analysis regarding nature protection. Proper economic valuation of protected areas may give valuable information but this valuation alone can not give the “correct” answer. Rather, it can be one among several other factors to consider when decisions are made on land-use and utilization of natural resources.

2. Evening program

The evening program consisted of talks from the conference's two guests of honour. They were Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, the former president of Iceland, and Dr. Jack D. Ives who is an honorary research professor at Charlton University in Canada.

Vigdís Finnbogadóttir gave a talk on Nordic natural heritage. She began her presentation by talking briefly about nature conservation in Iceland and how she became a conservationist herself. She explained how in the olden days people looked at the land from the point of view of how it could be utilized. Few people travelled into the highlands. Then, all of a sudden, the highlands became interesting. "Now it is popular to shoot geese and ptarmigan, with mobile phones and GPS equipment..." she said and wondered if people had lost contact with their natural surroundings. "...many people like to go on mountain hikes just because they find that it opens up for them the great natural beauty of the highlands. But there are still some who go there not to look at the beauty of the natural scenery but rather to test their equipment."

Vigdís went on to speak about the natural heritage of the Nordic countries and how we must ensure that this heritage is not threatened. "It is clear to us now that, formerly, poverty was the reason for exploiting the woodlands, and frequently such exploitation was based on lack of knowledge. This is understandable and we are not going to pass judgment on those generations. Now we at least have the relevant knowledge and are trying to reclaim the land, but unfortunately at the same time it often seems as we do not see that in our eagerness to acquire the magical phenomenon of megawatts with the accompanying assault on the land, we are actually treating the land more severely than anything our forefathers did when they were fighting for their own survival."

She emphasized the importance of having a feeling of reverence for something outside of oneself. "This reverence is dependent upon a feeling of affection toward life in general; it not only unfolds between people but also towards animals and nature," she said and asked why a nation that boasts about its prosperity had to conquer the precious habitat of other living beings.

The entire presentation of Vigdís Finnbogadóttir can be found in Appendix C of this report.

Jack D. Ives spoke about Icelandic nature in the domain of Vatnajökull. Ives first came to Iceland in 1952 and came in contact with the farmer Ragnar Stefánsson (1914-1994) at Skaftafell through Professor Sigurður Thórarinnsson. He stayed in Skaftafell for a period of time in 1952 and again in 1954 and showed the conference guests some slides

from the area taken during those trips. Ives spoke very fondly of Ragnar Stefánsson, who he met during his first trip and who became as a second father to him. “I think of him as a vital person who founded the national park at Skaftafell,” he said.

Figure 2. Contrast in Skaftafell, S-Iceland; vegetation, desert, ice, old times, modern times.

Photo: Helga Davids

Ives showed some slides that were many decades old and compared with a more recent photo of the same areas. One such area was bare sand in 1952 but covered with lupine some decades later. “I am not a conservationist and not a developer. I am somewhere in-between and I am not sure lupine is the enemy. I will leave that as a question for you,” Ives said when he compared the two pictures that first showed the land as bare sand and then as an area covered with lupine.

This cautious view was a theme of Ives’ talk. Although nature conservation is very important he emphasized the need to work with local people and take their needs into consideration. Also, local people often had an amazing knowledge of ecology and sustainable development even though they might not know the academic terms for those things. According to Ives, the farmer at Skaftafell, Ragnar Stefánsson, was a good example of such knowledgeable local person. “Some terrible mistakes have been made in the past within IUCN and UNESCO,” Ives said and refers to an example in Nepal where local cultures were destroyed in a need to follow strictly the model from the USA and Canada on how national parks should be managed. “There was no respect for the local people,” he said. Thankfully, he added, this view had been modified so now there is more room for human culture when managing protected areas.

Ives ended his talk by encouraging Icelanders to send in a proposal for making the area around Skaftafell a natural heritage site. “I don’t think it is necessary for all this land to be owned by the government first. My suggestion is that you consider sending in a proposal now,” he said.

3. Sharing experiences

The morning session on the second day of the conference included shorter presentations than the previous day and focused more on case studies and experiences of protected areas in different countries than on general themes.

3.1 The National Park Project in Denmark

Two people talked about this subject, one person from an NGO and one from the public sector.

Jan Eriksen, from the Danish Outdoor Council, informed the conference about the current process in Denmark on establishing national parks. The process began eight years ago when the OECD issued a report evaluating Denmark's environmental work. The report underlined the lack of large and coherent protected nature areas in Denmark. In 2002 the Danish Minister of Environment announced that he wanted to work on defining large coherent nature areas for the future and that to do this he wanted a public debate and the involvement of local people.

"The Outdoor Council seized this invitation and immediately asked the regional boards of volunteers to draw up a map for areas that to them had the potential to become national parks," Eriksen said. He also said that while working on this it became obvious to the team that they were working on defining national parks "because the areas must consist of elements of nature and elements of cultural heritage. There also had to be some room for recreational activities and for the local people and local business."

The Outdoor Council then presented this work to the Minister and he immediately embraced the idea of national parks. Since then Denmark has been in the process of developing a Danish model for national parks through a pilot phase. The entire process is based on democratic debate and the Outdoor Council, which is an NGO, has been an active participant in that debate.

Eriksson said he was very pleased that the government had decided to take this road. He also said this was a long process and, in his mind, the process should continue for the next 20-40 years. However, there are also some obstacles. "Our biggest fear," he said, referring to the view of his organization, "is that we end up with small fragments of what is already state-owned property, already protected and already under state management. And then the vision of national parks with local characteristic but national values is diminished."

Jakob Harrekilde Jensen, from the Danish Forest and Nature Agency, confirmed many of the things Jan Eriksen said about the Danish process. He also gave some further information on the structure of the process and how the pilot project was organized. The pilot project will look at seven areas in Denmark that could be potential candidates for becoming national parks. The local steering committee of the project must provide a report in July 2005, describing the vision, boundary and contents of those areas. About DKK 4 million have been allocated to each project and some have received additional funds from local counties and municipalities.

Jensen said this was a process with a time span of 20-30 years and that one of the requirements made by the government was that the public be involved in the process. He gave an example of how the public had been involved in a citizen's summit where 500 people came together for one day, talked about selected themes in groups and provided some good feedback to the local steering committee.

Both Eriksson and Jensen emphasized that the process of establishing national parks in Denmark would take a long time. However, Jensen hoped the first park could be established as early as 2008.

3.2 Sustainable nature tourism in Syöte National Park, Finland

Arto Ahokumpu, regional director for the Natural Heritage Services in Finland gave a talk explaining how what started as a small conservation site 50 years ago has developed into the Syöte National Park. The park is located 100km south of the Arctic Circle.

Ahokumpu said that in Finland all land for national parks had to be state owned and natural land, such as old growth forests or wetlands. In 1975, the National Park Committee first proposed to turn the small conservation site on the top of Syöte Fell into a national park. Ten years later a hiking area was defined, but such areas are similar to national parks in many countries. The main difference is that some sustainable use of forests is allowed. In 1991, the area received the status of a special protected area and in 1996 a conservation program for old growth forest areas was launched. Following this initiative the Syöte Working Group was formed and in 1998 it turned in a draft of the law for the Syöte National park. The law was passed and the park became a reality in the year 2000. Since then collaborative management has been used to build up the park and turn it into a sustainable tourist destination.

Ahokumpu gave a review of some of the things that have been done in the park since it was established. This included a three-year project with a budget of 1.6 million Euros in the period 1999-2002. The main objective of this project, called Syöte Life, was to combine nature protection with

other forms of land use. The project provided a good base for further work, but to implement it more financial resources were needed. They were provided by the Ministry of Labour which allocated a budget of 700,000 Euros to develop recreational facilities in the park. These facilities included new huts, fireplaces, nature trails and more. The main theme of the park was “the coexistence of nature and people”. Once the facilities were in place the focus shifted onto how to promote sustainable development in the park. To promote such development, park managers have used *The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas* as guidelines.

*In Syöte National Park in Finland. Information is a necessary base for knowledge.
Photo: Jorma Luhta*

3.3 Carrying capacity of protected areas in Iceland

Anna Dóra Sæþórsdóttir, associate professor at the University of Iceland, gave a short overview of research she has worked on to estimate the carrying capacity of some protected areas in Iceland. She explained the term *carrying capacity* as the maximum number of people who can use a site without an unacceptable decline in natural and social environment. Carrying capacity can be examined from four different points of view. Two relate to the environment (natural environment and infrastructure) and two relate to socio-cultural issues (tourists and host community). The results Anna Dóra presented focused on carrying capacity of tourist sites in protected areas from the point of view of the tourist visiting the sites.

The research covered six areas: three in the highlands (Landmannalaugar, Lónsöræfi and Sveinstindur), two in national parks (Jökulsárgljúfur and Skaftafell) and Lake Mývatn. In her presentation Anna

Dóra went over results from only one of these areas, Landmannalaugar. The area first became a tourist spot in 1961 at which time the journey there was quite an adventure. In 1970 a new road leading to Landmannalaugar was built and now it only takes three hours to get there from the capital area. Currently, Landmannalaugar has over 100,000 visitors each year.

The researchers asked the following questions: “Has increased tourism destroyed the wilderness experience in Landmannalaugar?” and “Has carrying capacity been reached in Landmannalaugar?” Most of the respondents said there were not too many tourists in the area, but about 20% thought there were too many tourists. Regarding services in the area, there were some conflicting views. Many said they did not want more services, but admitted that if more services were offered they would probably use them.

There were differences in results depending on where tourists placed themselves on the purist/urbanist scale. Most of the visitors enjoy the area and want to come back. With respect to these tourists the carrying capacity of the area has not been reached. However, the carrying capacity has been reached with respect to more purist tourists in search of pristine nature and they have left the area and moved to other places.

3.4 Nordic-Baltic network of protected areas

Bo Storrånk, from the Natural Heritage Services in Finland, gave a short overview of the Nordic-Baltic network of protected areas. The network was established in 2003 and is a part of a broader European network called EUROPAEC federation. This is an umbrella organization for Europe’s protected areas and unites national parks, regional parks, nature parks and biosphere reserves in 38 countries with the common aim of protecting Europe’s unique variety of wildlife, habitats and landscapes.

The aims of EUROPARC federation are to promote good practice in the management of protected areas, facilitate the establishments of new protected areas, and raise the profile of protected areas throughout Europe. The aims of the Nordic-Baltic section of EUROPARC are to facilitate exchange of information and expertise on protected area management, implement joint projects and other activities such as seminars, workshops and study visits in the Nordic and Baltic areas, promote exchange of information and expertise between the section and other EUROPARC sections and increase the membership of the EUROPARC federation.

For more information about the Nordic-Baltic section, visit the website: www.metsa.fi/europarc.

3.5 Outdoor recreation policy in Norway

Two people gave talks on this topic, both representatives of the Norwegian NGO sector.

Erik Solheim, from the Norwegian Society for the Conservation of Nature, emphasized the importance of silence in his talk on the outdoor recreation policy in Norway, which he said was a quality under threat.

Norway has had an outdoor recreation policy since 1970 but in 2001 this policy was updated. The aim of the policy, according to Solheim, is to promote simple outdoor life for everyone in their daily life, and in harmony with nature. "Simple in this context, means simple equipment, e.g. not using motor vehicles," said Solheim.

Iceclimbers in Jostadalsbreen National Park in Norway. Photo: Erik Solheim

Solheim referred to an opinion poll in Central Norway from 1999 where 60% of participants said that outdoor life was an important part of the Norwegian culture, 80% said outdoor life was a natural part of bringing up children and 5% thought outdoor life was out of date. He also said it was clear that outdoor life was more for the soul than the stomach, since 90% answered that the reason they went hiking was to experience silence and 85% said it was to get away from noise, pollution and stress.

"Silence is the single quality that most people are looking for. But silence is also a threatened quality," said Solheim and explained that in Norway there were laws that prohibit motorized vehicles in wilderness areas. However, currently there is a great pressure on changing the legislation. Some say that people should simply be allowed to do as they please, others that local authorities should be allowed to decide on this. Solheim said that experience showed that local authorities have a tendency to accept most requests they get about using motorized vehicles in wilderness areas so his organization is not very fond of either of those

ideas. “We think the current policy is good and feel there are already plenty of areas for motorized vehicles. We do not want them in wilderness areas.”

Harald Tronvik represented the Norwegian Association for Outdoor Recreation. He presented a summary of a government report to the parliament in Norway concerning mountain areas – their use, protection and economic values. The report focuses on sustainable use of hills and mountains and provides some guidelines on how to manage increased tourism. “How do we develop and support quality tourism,” he asked and referred to quality tourism as tourism that was managed with respect for the natural, economic, social and cultural environment in mountain areas.

Tourists are looking for an experience of nature and culture. This includes the fjords, mountains, untouched nature, beautiful landscape, silence and calmness. Sustainable tourism is a part of the brand mark for these areas. This means that several things need to be taken into consideration when mountain areas are managed. For instance, large infrastructural and technical enterprises need to be located outside the protected areas. Also, the use of motorized transport is not in accordance with tradition, politics for national parks or for the brand mark and it is important that the local community considers the national parks as an attraction.

Tronvik said he thought this government report gave some useful guidelines for mountain areas and the NGOs would press for these guidelines to be followed in the future.

3.6 Maintenance and promotion of the local cultural heritage

Giedrius Norvaisas from the Association of Lithuanian State Parks and Research spoke on the maintenance and promotion of cultural heritage in Lithuanian parks. He focused especially on Zemaitja National Park and gave examples of how the park administration honoured local cultural heritage by organizing traditional celebrations, using old unremembered traditions and rituals. Also, the park administration organized ethnocultural research, asked local people to teach about old traditions and involved the local communities, especially the youth, in the process of keeping old traditions.

There are two main celebrations in Zemaitja National Park; the Shrovetide Carnival and the Feast of Saint John (Midsummer). The Shrovetide Carnival is celebrated seven weeks before Easter and is a celebration to end winter and welcome the beginning of spring. Different rituals are used to try to drive out the cold winter and invite the warm spring. The Feast of Saint John celebrates the shortest night of the year. Many believe in the magical effect of this night for both man and nature

so the celebration involves a lot of magic and rituals. There is also dancing, games and singing all through the night.

Norvaisas said that the celebrations helped to spread the traditions of older generations to young local people and that this helped the younger generation to experience a sense of unity with their community and nature.

4. Reports from groups

On the first day of the conference, participants divided into groups and discussed different aspects of the conference topic. All groups had a lively session and on the second day, after the morning session on Sharing Experiences, the chairs of these groups presented the main points discussed in the group they had led. Below are reports from the groups written either by the chairs of the groups or a person in the group appointed by the chair to take notes.

4.1 Obstacles and opportunities in protected areas and national parks in densely populated areas

Chair: Lars Gudman Pedersen

After an introduction by the chair, the group discussed mainly three questions in relation to the theme:

1. How can we minimize the conflict between nature protection and many people/visitors?
2. How can we minimize the conflicts between nature protection and the demand for urban development?
3. How can we encourage an awareness of the importance of nature protection among people, particularly town people?

The group agreed very much that information is very important both in relation to conflicts between nature protection and leisure activities as well as between different types of visitors. Local involvement is also very important as well as discussion between the different interest groups. The need for a public involvement is probably higher in densely populated areas where there are various groups of people with different interests. In this respect it is important to realize that public involvement does not happen by itself. Someone must initiate, support and facilitate the process.

A point was made that we are now facing a new generation of visitors in protected areas. This is the generation of young people from the cities with little knowledge about nature and how to behave in it respecting nature values.

The group agreed that nature interpretation is greatly needed, especially for this younger generation, which has not learnt the basic rules

from their parents because they were raised in the cities. On the other hand, this new generation also brings some new opportunities. Densely populated areas have many children and young people and therefore it is easier to organize activities giving those people quality introduction and even education about nature. Examples of specific activities were shared and it was pointed out that to involve the new generation it was important to connect this with family.

A main threat to protection in densely populated areas is the demand for urban development, e.g. for new housing, infrastructure and recreational areas. The opinion was viewed that the protected areas should be protected by law once and for all; otherwise we would lose them little by little.

The potential for having real wilderness areas does not exist in densely populated areas and this must be realized. Instead, focus could be placed on activities involving nature interpretation. Also, attention should be given to the more quiet users, e.g. those that just like to come and enjoy a walk in the area. Furthermore, protected areas could be seen as a place people go to get inspired to visit other, more distant wilderness areas to get some more nature experience.

4.2 The role of the local community in the development and management of protected areas and national parks

Chair: Roger Crofts

The group addressed four questions:

- Who is the local community?
- Who sets the agenda?
- How are conflicts resolved?
- What role should locals have in governance?

Who is the local community?

- Agreed that local communities comprise: land owners, traditional rights, economic interests, elected representatives, women
- Particular importance of women noted as critical role as the 'glue' in communities compared with up front role of men as land owners, elected representatives etc.
- Long and unresolved debate on the role of farmers as owned much of land in potential protected areas, particularly whether they were more important than other stakeholders and whether they should be compensated for loss of land rights and income opportunities
- Recognition of other constituencies of interest at national level but difficult to define and engage

Who sets the agenda?

- Perception that protected areas are imposed by outside interests without consultation and without understanding of local circumstances
- Perceived as threat to current activities, including role of farmers in maintaining quality of nature
- Farmers believe that visitors cause more damage than farmers do and that compensation must be given to produce a win-win situation
- Strong view that farmers should set the agenda as they own the crucial resource of land and protected area cannot go ahead without their support and agreement

How are the conflicts resolved?

- Problem of many conflicts
- Lots of conflicts between proposers of protected areas and local interests
- Lots of conflicts between different local interests
- Protected areas seen much more as a threat than an opportunity
- Labelling an area means ignoring areas community values

Ingredients for resolution

- Need to switch mind sets from threat to opportunity
- Devise vision for the land and landscape, considering all options
- Need to give adequate time for conflicts to be resolved
- Need to have machinery and process for conflict resolution
- Consider playing different groups against each other, especially others versus farmers
- Should increase local knowledge of nature and natural resources
- Employ local people in the protected area
- Provide resources for compensation to farmers and land owners, use new EU CAP opportunities
- Provide resources for participation (e.g. EU LIFE projects) and for positive management
- Use voluntary system for financial incentives and management

Mechanisms for resolution

- Provide more cash: from government, from charging for services provided (e.g. parking, camping etc), but charging entrance fee very contentious issue culturally, and also practical problems
- Set up groups/steering committees to consider issues in open and honest manner
- Vital that all interests are involved
- If government takes the lead, then ensure truly participative engaging all interests
- Allow local interests to report direct to decision makers in government

- Use Management Plan production as mechanism beginning at early stage

What role should locals have in governance?

- No clear agreement between advisory committee or decision making committee, or whether government is governing body or local body
- Preference for election of governing body
- Need for bottom up approach along with national networking

4.3 How can we help visitors to understand and appreciate the wonders of nature in national parks and protected areas (nature interpretation)?

Chair: Eva Ritter

Ways of appreciating nature

The session was opened with a discussion about what appreciation of nature means and in which ways people may appreciate nature. Some may do this more directly and actively (outdoor activities, sports), others more passively (relaxing their soul and mind, watching animals). However, the group agreed that there is no wrong or right way of nature appreciation.

Nevertheless, conflicts between the different groups cannot be avoided. For a person enjoying the silence of nature, one jeep alone can be enough to destroy this experience, while the jeep driver might not care about 10 other jeeps, (but maybe about 50 other jeeps), at the same place. It may therefore become necessary to outline restrictions and rules about how to behave in nature areas. And the rules have to be clear, so people can understand and remember them, e.g. when not to drive on the glacier or where not to go in an area.

Target groups

In order to change the attitude of people in this direction, one should consider which target group is addressed. Examples for target groups could be children, school classes, tourist groups, urban people, local communities, and even politicians. Each target group may be addressed in a different way and by different activities.

Independent of the target group, the main point in increasing the appreciation of nature is to get people in contact with nature. They have to experience the positive influence of nature (“learning by doing”). Especially people living in townships and urban areas need to experience nature and thereby feel what this experience means for them. They may in this way learn to care about nature, because they relate it to a positive experience.

Education

As the next step in increasing nature appreciation, teaching or educating visitors of nature areas about nature was suggested, so that they can develop their own personal way of nature interpretation. The group tried to distinguish between the terms education, i.e. providing information, and interpretation, i.e. having an opinion on a topic. Nevertheless, providing knowledge seems to be the basis for the process of nature interpretation and appreciation in the minds of the visitors.

Some good examples for this kind of education were mentioned in the discussion group:

- Visitor centres. For those coming to a place for the first time and those who want to get an introduction of where to go, what to see, etc.
- Guided tours. The advantage of this activity is that it can be directed to the individual needs of different target groups
- Training of people (courses) about the topics and features of a national park or protected area. There were examples about training tourist guides from a city in the vicinity of a national park and even politicians
- Special programs for local people may be very attractive, so they do not feel that a national park is only for foreign visitors, but also involves them

Emotions

The most important point in the context of appreciation of nature, however, is that the people develop an emotional bond to sites. If they feel something for a nature site, they will care about it and feel responsible for it and they may care more about other nature sites as well. This emotional bond can be built up based on historical/cultural relations, spiritual connections, and also knowledge on a biological/geological level.

One aim must be that people behave correctly in nature (e.g. taking the litter home again, not disturbing vulnerable spots in the landscape) because they feel like it, and not because rules prohibit different, damaging activities. This, however, means that the thinking and feeling of some people needs to be changed, and it is obviously more difficult to change the mind of a person with little contact to nature (i.e. one sitting in the jeep and not caring about any restrictions) than those used to experiencing the wonders of nature very closely (such as bird watchers, hikers, “purists”).

Local communities

Discussion also took place on the issue that the involvement of the local communities is very important. They may already have an emotional bond to the place, or they should develop it again. Then they care about the nature in the area and feel proud of having it in their neighbourhood.

It is equally important that decision makers listen to the local communities and take advantage of the knowledge of the local people. Using local knowledge and stories, e.g. in the development of visitor centres, can strengthen the emotional bonds of these people to the protected area.

Local people should always be involved in political decisions, and if possible they should get responsibility or even duties in connection with nature protection. As mentioned above, offering special activities for local people and their children (in contrast to activities for tourist) may help them to appreciate the nature they have so close by.

Examples

Some examples of educational and other activities in order to increase the appreciation of nature were given by the participants of the discussion group:

- "Day of the Forest", "Day of the Birds" etc. – inviting people into nature and providing activities for all different target groups and ages
- Training courses for nature guides
- "Poems" written for the locals and put up in beautiful places in the landscape
- Inviting and guiding schools, larger tourist groups from towns, etc.
- "Call nature" – information given by cell phones on attractive spots in the landscape
- Visitor centres built up with the help of locals
- To open up for new experiences: "stop – and look around" signs
- Small visitor centres or just pamphlets provided at the entrance of a nature reserve, park, or forest

Conclusion

In short, there seem to be three main keywords describing a way to help people to understand and appreciate the wonder of nature:

- contact
- education
- emotions

4.4 How can national parks and protected areas best be used for outdoor activities, in order to meet the objectives to improve human health, without spoiling the natural heritage?

Chair: Henning Enemark

National parks are created by society. Some of the questions the group dealt with were the following: Do we have an obligation to meet social needs, as well as the need to protect nature in these areas? What is the main reason for creating national parks? Could these questions be linked together, as an answer as to how we can deal with social challenges? As an answer to this, political solutions must be generated.

The view was presented that the group should not only focus on the national parks, but also pay attention to the nearby landscape. Also, that the groups should bear in mind the responsibility society has towards these parks. Some of the points raised in the group discussion were the following:

- Snowmobiles are a problem in national parks in Iceland, and there is a conflict between those who enjoy walking, and the people driving up the mountains.
- What about people with disabilities? They should also be permitted to go into the national parks, even though it can't be seen as a human right to drive a snowmobile or a four-wheel-drive everywhere in nature. One solution could be to separate areas, and grant permission for motor vehicles in some zones.
- The health-aspect is important. How can we include this aspect into the national parks discussion?
- Elderly people should also be mentioned and included when national parks are planned and maintained. Elderly people should also be able to look out on beautiful landscapes.
- In Norway snowmobiles are not permitted for leisure-driving in nature. The nature gives us everything that we need to get and maintain good health. To protect nature we can let people walk in the national parks, and permit necessary transportation of goods and so on in winter. In Finnmark there are great damages because of driving in summer, when the bare ground is vulnerable. We also need more exercise to provide better health. Snowmobiles are a democratic problem, as most people seek nature for the reason of seeking peace and quiet.
- Is it acceptable to use a snowmobile for practical reasons, while driving for fun should be prohibited? Should it be legal to transport disabled people and goods? Should it be legal to drive in special areas? These questions have been discussed in Iceland, without any

conclusions made as yet. In a meeting about Snæfellsjökull, a division of the area into five different zones was suggested. At Vatnajökull snowmobiles and 4WH-drives are prohibited, but people keep breaking the rules.

- Motor vehicles in nature can stress people, especially when driving is done purely for fun. Even so, most people do not react to a vehicle which is driven for necessary activities such as working in the forests.
- If use of motor vehicles causes stress to people seeking nature for peace and quiet, this could affect our health in a negative way.
- How can we make young people seek nature? Most of them become very interested once we manage to get them out in the nature. Most young people, given the opportunity to live a simple outdoor life, would like to try this again on a later occasion. National parks should be for everybody. Young people must therefore be introduced to the parks, also young people with disabilities. We have to discuss strategies on how young people are to be introduced to the national parks.
- Protected areas should benefit both humans and nature itself. We will have to make a link between education, kindergartens etc. What can environmental authorities contribute in this connection? It is important to look into these matters with a wider view, working and co-operating across borders and different social fields. Co-operation between the Nordic societies is valuable in this connection, exchanging scientific results and experiences to see what is being done both at the national and Nordic level.
- It is important to include all people in the work of protecting nature, also local farmers and those who like leisure driving.
- In Sweden there has been some research on the educational system and the use of nature. Swedish schools make little use of nature in education. We do not teach children just to be in nature, to feel and experience nature itself. Children are always told to do things on purpose, not just being there, seeking peace and quiet. Many children today are not used to silence and quiet at all. The main reason why children don't use nature as much as before is the competition from PCs and TV, as modern societies provide more and more entertainment culture. Outdoor life for children must take place in the nearby surroundings, near to schools and homes.
- Nature can't solve every problem in society, like the fact that most of us sit too much during the day. But nature can help us get a better and healthier life.
- Accessibility: we have to look into what possibilities we have to make the national parks accessible, although we have to be very careful to make as small changes as possible in the landscape. It is not necessary to build accommodations in protected areas. If we open up for free use

of motor vehicles in national parks and protected areas, the main qualities of nature will be reduced for everybody.

- In Finland, schools have initiated a project where children can go to school camps for learning more about nature. The national parks can be used for such purposes, to educate children in outdoor life and protecting nature. It is a question whether to initiate such a project at a national level, to provide schools with necessary tools and possibilities for educating children through the national parks. Co-operation is needed to get good results.
- In Denmark attention is drawn to the protected areas, to give them special value. It is easier to attend to larger national parks than to many small, local areas.
- How can protecting nature serve other interests as well? Maybe other authorities, like the health ministries should take some responsibility. Outdoor life activities are a very cost-effective way of developing and providing good health for most people.
- The national parks are national symbols, which should be thought and spoken of with pride. The parks are of national value, and should contribute to strengthening the national identity. This is important, as we live in an urbanized world where more and more young people seem to lose their identity.
- In Norway, 2005 is designated as “Friluftslivets År” (Year of Outdoor Life), initiated by the authorities. During this year, the outdoor life organizations are planning and arranging outdoor activities all over the country. The main goal is to highlight simple and everyday outdoor life, in efforts to make more people active and fond of outdoor life. Disabled people, children and young people are special target groups.
- Is there a need for more networking? There are a lot of international projects, and it is valuable to exchange experiences. But this can be done through existing channels and different groups who already work with issues on nature and health.

Running in a Danish wood. Nature can be a supportive environment for health.
Photo: Preben Schmidt

4.5 Theory and practice in the management and physical planning of national parks

Chair: Guðríður Þorvarðardóttir

There was some discussion about the establishments of parks in the group. The points raised included the importance of identifying who should be involved in establishing the park, what the target groups were, what development should be allowed and who the responsible body was. Also mentioned was the importance of including the stakeholders and establishing an advisory working group during the establishment phase as well as during the management phase. The general public should also be involved and this could be done e.g. by adapting a flower for the park or adopting a cultural monument.

Some of the questions discussed were:

- What is our desired future condition?
- Is the practice always in accordance with the concepts or guidelines?

To answer these questions the group agreed that a management plan is needed, as the desired vision for the protected area is introduced in the plan and we need the plan so we can see how we are doing.

For proper management a management plan is needed that identifies the key features and values and has clearly established management objectives and indicates what actions are needed. The group also emphasized that the plan must be flexible in order to cater for unseen events that might take place during the plan's operation. Also, goals, strategies and evaluations must very clear.

To design a management plan it is important to know the area's natural and cultural environment, who the visitors are, the impact on stakeholders and what the legislative framework is. The group agreed that expert knowledge is needed for the first stage but staff members need to be able to update all data. Also, it is important to keep in mind that a management plan is a never ending story; it must be evaluated and reviewed.

Regarding management and resources it was discussed that in some countries it has proven difficult to provide enough resources for long-term monitoring in protected areas. When resources are limited, monitoring and research of natural and cultural features as well as visitor monitoring are often seen as a luxury. They are the first projects to be dropped in an otherwise good and comprehensive management plan. The group felt this was a major mistake since monitoring is needed to see if the area is heading in the right direction to the desired future condition.

Lack of resources causes less data collecting, less developing of staff, less or no increase in number of staff, less or no monitoring, less or no remedy work on the park's paths or other services and less interpretation or environmental education for visitors.

The chair introduced a quote discussing the results of too little monitoring:

The past practice according to Graham Barrow, in "How Many More Can We Take":

"...Yet there is not proper reference point for the debate and certainly no hard data upon which to base judgments. If we are lucky there may be some photographs taken at a special event in 1950 and someone carried out a biological survey in 1970 and visitors were counted for four years until the traffic counter broke down! But there has been no consistent monitoring of anything that anyone has agreed is a measure of change. Mention the word "monitoring" or "evaluation" and everyone runs a mile!"

Regarding the future, the group agreed there would be an increased demand for management plans according to national legislations, Ramsar site management plans, World Heritage site management plans, Natura 2000 management plans etc. This work will take up a lot of manpower in national parks and there is a question of how parks can cope with this added pressure. Also, again the group reminded that management plans needed to be reviewed and the site evaluated.

Sammenfatning

Konferansen ble delt opp i seksjoner med innledende tematiske forelesninger i starten, og deretter i case-studies og diskusjonsgrupper. I forelesningen ble søkelyset rettet mot noen sentrale temaer som det ble arbeidet videre med gjennom hele konferansen.

Store og fleksible vernede områder – De fleste av konferansedeltakerne mente at det var ønskelig å oppnå vern av store og sammenhengende områder fremfor mange spredte små områder. De store vernede områder kan deles opp i forskjellige soner m.h.t. hvor strenge regler som skal gjelde om fredningen. De fleste deltakere la vekt på at vernede områder skulle styres med sikte på å gjøres tilgjengelige for allmennheten. Videre mente de fleste deltakerne at det ikke er en nødvendig forutsetning for fredning at område ikke er bebodd av mennesker og at arealet tilhørte staten.

Deltakelse av "stakeholders" og lokal befolkningen – "Deltakelse" var et nøkkelord i diskusjonen. Å involvere alle relevante aktører i forbedelsen av en vernesak kan være både en tidskrevende og vanskelig oppgave, ble det konstatert av mange. Men dette ble sett på som en nødvendig forutsetning hvis en vil unngå vanskelige konflikter i fremtiden. Opplæring av de ansatt i vernede områder med sikte på at de vil bli bedre til å løse konflikter, ble av mange nevnt som en hensiktsmessig og lønnsom investering.

Utdanning og bevisstgjøring – Naturveiledning som bidrar til å øke både respekt og forståelse for naturen er en viktig oppgave for administrasjonen av vernede områder. I en av diskusjonsgruppene diskuterte man spesielt hvordan naturen kunne fortolkes for gjestene, og i en annen gruppe ble også spørsmålet om hvordan man kan øke bevisstheten om naturvern tatt opp. Det ble konstatert at det ikke er tilstrekkelig å informere gjestene. Informasjonsformidlingen skal utformes på en slik måte at den vil kunne bidra til endre gjestenes atferd med hensyn til ferdsel i naturen. Ett av de spørsmål som ble reist i salen var hvordan man kunne bli bedre til å påvirke mennesker som har glede av motorisert friluftsliv (jeeps).

Vernede områder er viktige for helsen – Et gjennomgående tema for konferansen var vernede områders betydning for helse. Mange deltakere følte at dette tema ikke ble diskutert på en tilstrekkelig måte og ønsket en ytterligere konferanse i fremtiden til å diskutere dette emnet spesielt. En meningsfull diskusjon om dette forutsetter deltakere fra helsesektoren, og ikke bare fra friluftsliv- og naturvernsektorene innen for administrasjon og det frie foreningsliv. En mulig oppgave for Nordisk Ministerråd kunne være å skape et forum for dialog mellom fagfolk i naturvern og helse.

Appendix A: Program

National Parks, Outdoor Life and Health

Nordic Conference, Hotel Skaftafell, Freysnes, Iceland 5 –7 May 2005

Thursday 5 May

Arrival at Keflavik Airport. Bus transport and excursion from Keflavik to Freysnes (located close to Vatnajökull, Europe's largest glacier, on the south coast some 350km east of Reykjavik). During the tour information will be provided about nature, culture and history in the southern part of Iceland.

Friday 6 May

08.30- 12.00 Central issues – introductory lectures

Opening address – (8.30-8.40)

Sigríður Anna Þórðardóttir, Minister for the Environment, Iceland.

Vatnajökull National Park - Europe's largest national park

Conservation issues (1) (08.50-09.20)

Peter Agger, Denmark

Development of conservation measures and the design of protected areas over time, Nordic as well as global perspectives

Conservation issues (2) (09.20-09.40)

Árni Finnsón, Iceland Nature Conservation Association

The conservation of Iceland's natural heritage and Iceland's natural heritage in a global context. A critical review

Coffee Break

Conservation and recreation in protected areas: reconciling opposites? (10.10-10.40)

Roger Croft, Scotland

The local adaptation and implementation of IUCN categories for protected areas and the promotion of outdoor recreation

Health issues (10.40-11.10)

Peter Schantz, Sweden

Benefits of outdoor recreation in terms of life quality and improved health

Economic issues (11.10-11.40)

Kristin Magnussen, Norway

Economic measurements of services that protected areas provide human society

12.00-13.00 Lunch

13.00 – 15.00 Group discussion

Themes:

A. Obstacles and opportunities in protected areas and national parks in densely populated areas.

Chair: Lars Gudman Pedersen

B. The role of the local community in the development and management of protected areas and national parks

Chair: Roger Crofts

C. How can we help visitors to understand and appreciate the wonders of nature in national parks and protected areas (nature interpretation)?

Chair: Eva Ritter

D. How can national parks and protected areas best be used for outdoor activities, in order to meet the objectives to improve human health, without spoiling the natural heritage?

Chair: Henning Enemark

E. Theory and practice in the management and physical planning of national parks.

Chair: Guðríður Þorvarðardóttir

15.00-19.00 Excursions to Skaftafell National Park

19.30 Dinner

21.00 Evening program

Speakers:

Nordic Natural Heritage

Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, the former president of Iceland

Icelandic Nature in the Domain of Vatnajökull

Jack D. Ives, honorary research professor at Charlton University in Canada.

Saturday 7 May

08.30 – 10.30 – Sharing Experiences

The National Park Project in Denmark (08.30-09.00)

Jan Eriksen, Danish Outdoor Council and Jakob Harrekilde Jensen, Danish Forest and Nature Agency

Sustainable nature tourism in Syöte National Park, Finland (09.00-09.20)

Arto Ahokumpu, Finland

Coffee break

Carrying capacity of protected areas in Iceland (09.30-09.40)

Anna Dóra Sæþórsdóttir, University of Iceland

Nordic-Baltic network of protected areas (09.40-09.50)

Bo Storrånk, Finland

Outdoor recreation policy in Norway (10.00-10.15)

Erik Solheim, Norway

Maintenance and promotion of the local cultural heritage - warrant of the sustainable development of protected area (10.15-10.30)

Giedrius Norvaisas, Lithuania

11-12.30 Reports from groups – discussion and closing of the conference

13.30 Departure for Reykjavik – excursion

Conference chairs: *Magnús Jóhannesson and Katrín Eymundsdóttir*

Conference report writer and editor: *Auður H Ingólfssdóttir*

Appendix B: List of participants

Name	Institution/Association	Country
Kári Thomsen	Føroya Náttúruverndarfelag, FNU	Faeroe Islands
Jack D. Ives	United Nations University	Canada
Anita Søholm	Danish Society for Nature Conservation	Denmark
Anton Stahl Olafsson	Interreg. IIIa project	Denmark
Claus Lyngby Petersen	Pilot project National Park Moen	Denmark
Ditte Svendsen	Danish Forest and Nature Agency - Thy District	Denmark
Eva Ritter	Danmarks Naturfredningsforening/ Agricultural University of Iceland	Denmark
Hans Ole Hansen	Danish Forest and Nature Agency, State Forest District of Fussingø	Denmark
Henning Enemark	Friluftsrådet	Denmark
Ida Sloth Bonnevie	Friluftsrådet	Denmark
Jacob Funder	Danish National Federation of Youth Schools headmaster, Danish Outdoor Council	Denmark
Jakob Harrekilde Jensen	Danish Forest and Nature Agency	Denmark
Jan Eriksen	Friluftsrådet, FEE	Denmark
Jan Woolhead	Naturpark Maribosøerne	Denmark
Jane Grønning	Pilot Project National Park Moen	Denmark
Karolin Lovén	Nordic Council of Ministers	Denmark
Kirsten Nielsen	Friluftsrådet	Denmark
Lars Gudmand Pedersen	Danish Forest and Nature Agency	Denmark
Lisbet Damtoft Andersen	Danish Forest and Nature Agency	Denmark
Martin Nissen	Geografisk Institut	Denmark
Nikolaj Bock	Nordic Council of Ministers	Denmark
Paul Debois	County of Storstrøm, Dep. of Landscape and Pl.	Denmark
Peder Agger	Roskilde University, Dep. of Environment, Technology and Social Studies	Denmark
Poul Hjulmann	Friluftsrådet	Denmark
Arto Ahokumpu	Metsähallitus, Natural Heritage Services	Finland
Bo Storrånk	Metsähallitus/EUROPARC Nordic-Baltic Section	Finland
Carl-Sture Österman	The Finnish Association for Nature Conservation	Finland
Esko Vuorinen	The Finnish Association for Nature Conservation	Finland
Lasse Loven	Finnish Forest Research Institute - Koli NP	Finland
Lotta Nummelin	Finnish Society for Nature and Environment	Finland
Magnus Östman	Editor in chief of Finlands Natur	Finland
Rauno Väisänen	Metsähallitus, Natural Heritage Services	Finland
Mette-Astrid Jessen	Ministry of Environment and Nature	Greenland
Anna Dóra Sæþórsdóttir	University of Iceland, Dep. of Geosciences	Iceland
Auður H. Ingólfssdóttir	Environice	Iceland
Árni Bragason	Environment and Food Agency of Iceland	Iceland
Árni Finnson	Iceland Nature Conservation Association	Iceland
Barbara Stanzeit	Forest Association of Gardabær	Iceland
Chas Goemans	Environment and Food Agency of Iceland	Iceland
Eliás Bjarni Gíslason	Icelandic Tourist Board	Iceland
Elke Wald	Húsavík Whale Museum	Iceland
Enrico Bruno	Worldfriends, Iceland	Iceland
Fríða Björg Eðvarðsdóttir	Cooperative Committee of Iceland's Central Highlands	Iceland
Guðbjörg Gunnarsdóttir	Environment and Food Agency of Iceland	Iceland
Guðríður Þorvarðardóttir	Environment and Food Agency of Iceland	Iceland
Haukur Þór Haraldsson	Public Health Institute of Iceland	Iceland
Helga Davids	Environment and Food Agency of Iceland	Iceland
Ines Dehouck	Worldfriends, Iceland	Iceland
Jón Helgason	Landvernd, Icelandic Environment Association	Iceland
Jón Jól Einarsson	Landvernd, Icelandic Environment Association	Iceland
Katrín Eymundsdóttir	Municipal government, Kelduneshreppur, Iceland	Iceland

Kári Kristjánsson	Environment and Food Agency of Iceland	Iceland
Kristín Linda Árnadóttir	Ministry for the Environment	Iceland
Magnús Jóhannesson	Ministry for the Environment	Iceland
Margrét Valdimarsdóttir	Environment and Food Agency of Iceland	Iceland
Oscar-Mauricio Uscategui	Worldfriends, Iceland	Iceland
Ragnar Frank Kristjánsson	Environment and Food Agency of Iceland	Iceland
Ragnhildur Sigurðardóttir	Agricultural University of Iceland	Iceland
Rannveig Thoroddsen	Landvernd, Icelandic Environment Association	Iceland
Sigríður Anna Þórðardóttir	Ministry for the Environment	Iceland
Sigurður Á. Þráinsson	Ministry for the Environment	Iceland
Sigurður K. Oddson	Thingvellir National Park	Iceland
Sigprúður S. Jóhannsdóttir	Environment and Food Agency of Iceland	Iceland
Stefán Benediktsson	Environment and Food Agency of Iceland	Iceland
Stella Hrönn Jóhannsdóttir	Environment and Food Agency of Iceland	Iceland
Trausti Baldursson	Environment and Food Agency of Iceland	Iceland
Tryggvi Felixson	Landvernd, Icelandic Environment Association	Iceland
Ulla Pedersen	NAUST, Nature Conservation Association of East Iceland	Iceland
Valur Þór Hilmarsson	Icelandic Tourist Board	Iceland
Vigdís Finnbogadóttir	Landvernd, Icelandic Environment Association	Iceland
Juris Jātnieks	The Administration Teici Nature Reserve	Latvia
Līga Lieplapa	Celteka	Latvia
Rolands Auzins	Nature Protection Board	Latvia
Albertas Kvietkus	Kursių Nerija National Park Administration	Lithuania
Dalius Sungaila	Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection Dep.	Lithuania
Eugenijus Drobelis	Dzukija National Park	Lithuania
Giedrius Norvaisas	Žemaitija National Park, The Association of Lithuanian State Parks and Research	Lithuania
Erik Solheim	Norges Naturvernforbud	Norway
Espen Stokke	Norwegian 4H	Norway
Harald Tronvik	The Norwegian National Association for Outdoor Recreation.	Norway
Hege Langeland	Directorate for Nature Management	Norway
Kirsten Thyrum	Dovre fjell-Sunndalsfjella National Park	Norway
Kristin Madsen	Norwegian 4H	Norway
Kristin Magnussen	Association for Resource and Environmental Economists	Norway
Marit Nyhuus	Hedmark fylkeskommune	Norway
Ragnvald Larsen	Den Norske Turistforening (DNT)	Norway
Randi Boe	Directorate for Nature Management	Norway
Stein Kollungstad	Ministry of Environment in Norway	Norway
Toril E. Steien	Tynset kommune	Norway
Roger Crofts	IUCN world Commission on Protected Areas	Scotland
Ann-Kristine Johansson	Member of Parliament	Sweden
Carina Ohlsson	Member of Parliament	Sweden
Egon Enocksson	Naturvårdsverket	Sweden
Eva Stighäll	Senior Administrative Officer	Sweden
Gunilla Ericsson	Friluftsrådet	Sweden
Jan Terstad	Ministry of Sustainable Development	Sweden
Peter Schantz	University College of Physical Education and Sports	Sweden
Sinikka Bohlin	Member of Parliament	Sweden
Ulf Silvester	FRISAM, Friluftsförbund i samverkan	Sweden

Appendix C: Presentation by Vigdís Finnbogadóttir

Former president of Iceland, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, was one of two special guests of honor at the conference. She gave a speech in the evening of the first day where she talked about Nordic Natural Heritage and the relationship between man and nature in general. She has kindly allowed the organizers of the conference to publish the entire speech in this report.

Nordic Natural Heritage

Vigdís Finnbogadóttir (President of Iceland 1980-96):

It is a great pleasure, as patron of Landvernd, the Icelandic Environment Association, to be addressing this prestigious Conference on the Environment here at Skaftafell, the 'base-camp' (as we might call it) of one of the four National Parks in Iceland: Skaftafell National Park.

This area encompasses some of the most spectacular scenery in all Iceland: a staggering diversity of mountains and glacier and slumbering volcanoes, of lush vegetation and barren wastelands, of devastation and breathtaking fertility, of ice and fire. And its story encapsulates a microcosm of the social history of Iceland itself.

I recall with pride that the first settler in the Skaftafell district, late in the ninth century, was a woman. She was a widow named Þorgerður, whose husband Ásbjörn (son of the lord of Sogn, in Norway) had died at sea on a colonizing voyage to Iceland and had never reached the Promised Land. According to *Landnámabók*, the Icelandic *Book of Settlements*, Þorgerður was undeterred, and carried out her husband's intention to claim land on which to settle. In those days women were permitted to claim as much land as they could traverse leading a two-year-old heifer between sunrise and sunset on a spring day. This Þorgerður did, leading her heifer from Kvía to Jökulfell west of the Morsá river and taking possession of most of the area now known as Öræfasveit (Wasteland District). She made her home there with her sons.

Here we are at the well-springs of Iceland's history. One of Þorgerður's great-grandsons was Flosi Þórðarson of Svínafell, the historic manor farm which lies just to the east of here. Flosi figures largely in *Njáls saga*; he was the leader of the confederacy of enemies who burned

alive the sage Njáll and his sons in their home at Berþórshvoll on an August evening in 1011.

Other settlers in the area take us back to the early Christians who came to Iceland at the start of the 10th century: *Landnámabók* tells us of a man named Ketill fíflski (the Foolish), so nicknamed because he was a Christian. He was a Norwegian who came to Iceland via the Hebrides, and he made his home at the place now known as Kirkjubæjarklaustur, just to the west of here.

Another would-be settler, Þórður *illugi*, wrecked his ship on the desolate reaches of Breiðamerkursandur, but survived to settle in a farm at Breiðá (Broad river). His great-great-granddaughter Hildur would become the wife of Njáll's violent eldest son, Skarp-Heðinn; and the farm of Breiðá was given by Flosi to Kári Sölmundarson after their reconciliation after the Burning of Bergórshvoll.

And down on the surf-fretted seashore stands Ingólfshöfði (Ingólfur's Headland), where the First Settler of Iceland, Ingólfur Arnarson, made land around the year 873 and stayed for the winter, moving west to find his destined home at Reykjavík.

Yes, we are in the cockpit of history here, in a land described in the 13th-century *Speculum Regale* (King's Mirror) as 'full of vast and boundless fires, overpowering frost and glaciers, boiling springs and torrents of icy floods'. Farming was always a matter of subsistence, and always haunted by peril. In 1362 the cone volcano under Örfajökull glacier erupted with terrible violence, sending mud-slides surging over the Skaf-tafell area. Some 400 people were killed in this glacier-burst. Life and death, hazard and history, Nature and national identity – these were always tightly clenched together. The land is our true resource and national treasure; the land is where our identity as Icelanders is embedded. Our language has reflected this for over 1100 years.

When I was a teenager I worked on a farm helping with the hay-making in my summer holiday, like so many other youngsters in Iceland. In my case the farm was in Southern Iceland; and I noticed that every time we had dry weather with northerly winds, a massive dust-storm would build up to the south of the lush district where I was staying, blotting out our view of the Eyjafjallajökull glacier and the saga-sites of *Njáls saga*. This dust-storm was soil erosion in relentless action, blowing the precious land seawards.

Ever since then, I have been an environmentalist and an ardent supporter of those who work towards the goal of bringing a halt to soil erosion, and I have sided equally with the land itself and with the people. Indeed, it should be noted that this erosion in Rangárþingi was halted by human intelligence, and that we have seen comparable results in many

other areas in Iceland. But Iceland is a large place, and much remains to be done, to resist and overcome the assaults of the elements and to batten down this island hall of the winds in the Atlantic. The land is our true resource and treasure, alongside our language and our people.

On the other hand my foster brother, bless him, who was a farmer, thought I was talking nonsense. He could not see any of this soil erosion. Once, when he was in the north of Iceland, he telephoned me and said something along the lines of: 'My dear Vigdís, don't you realise that in many places on the way north the vegetation is so lush that it is downright unsightly?'

For a moment I thought, 'What does he mean – unsightly?' And then it came to me what he was seeing: at the roadside and in ditches all around Iceland the vegetation was lush with grass and flowers, and this vegetation was not being utilised, no one was mowing it. He saw Nature only in terms of its potential exploitation. He was a farmer of the old school, but today he would have been battling for the conservation of the Þjórsárver area, just as all his children do today. He had been born around 1920, a son of the last generation of Icelanders who saw the land only in terms of its utilitarian benefits. Only one generation has passed since this was the general way of thinking.

It is only 30 to 40 years since Icelanders began to think of Nature as something more than simply land with vegetation for feeding livestock. Formerly very few people ventured into the Icelandic highlands. Such trips were seen as adventures, and people found the Nature they encountered there very, very spectacular; others found it remote and uncanny, even though it had for centuries been closely linked to our common heritage through the Icelandic sagas – the literature and memories which have made us Icelanders.

The wilderness teems with place-names bestowed on mountains, valleys and rivers in the Middle Ages when people thought nothing of riding on horseback across the highlands for the annual meeting of the Alþingi. People had an excellent knowledge of the country then.

Nowadays the highlands have become a destination in their own right. People now go into the highlands on adventure trips in giant All Terrain Vehicles in order to enjoy themselves on snowmobiles and even motorcycles. They go to shoot game, with mobile phones and GPS equipment at the ready – making contact with the untamed environment at second hand, through satellites. Everything changes, so that today, thank goodness, people like to go on mountain hikes just because they find that it opens up for them the great natural beauty of the highlands. But there are still some who treat wild Nature as a challenging obstacle course, and go there not in search of beauty but to test their hi-tech equipment.

Iceland is a classic early case of desertification caused by over-exploitation of natural resources. Our first vernacular historian, Ari *fróði* Þorgilsson (Ari the Learned) wrote in his *Íslendingabók* (Book of Icelanders) that when the first Norse settlers arrived, 'Iceland was wooded between mountain and shore'. It is clear that in the year 874 at least 60% of the island was covered with vegetation. Birch woodlands covered at least 25% of the country, and shrub willows and other dwarf shrubs dominated the vegetation above 300 or 400 metres. The arrival of humans and their livestock had a disastrous impact on Iceland's ecosystem: trees were cleared, wholesale, to make room for grazing, woodlands were cut down and burned for charcoal. The fragile soil was exposed to merciless winds in a deteriorating climate.

It is clear to us, with hindsight, that need was the prime reason for exploiting the original woodlands, for instance, usually through ignorance. That was understandable, and we should not pass judgment on those generations. Now we have the relevant knowledge and are trying to reclaim the lost land, but all too often, alas, we seem to ignore that knowledge willfully in our headlong pursuit of extra megawatts. With the accompanying assault on the land, we are actually treating the land more brutally than anything our forefathers did when they were fighting for survival.

The aim of nature conservation is to promote the propitious interaction between people and Nature, so that the exploitation of Nature becomes sustainable. Protecting Nature is a perfectly valid type of land-use, as valid as any other. Nature conservation ensures, as far as possible, the natural development of the environment according to its own laws.

The land, the flora and the fauna have gained increased significance because people have learned that in order to prosper they must have *respect* for something outside of themselves. Respect means treating others with consideration; it means recognising the rights of others and appreciating those rights. Respect is dependent upon a feeling of love for life in general, not just between people but also towards animals and Nature.

Animals have their own habitats. Generation after generation they are dependent upon specific areas. Here in Iceland only a specific quota of reindeer may now be hunted every year, and at present the shooting of ptarmigan is banned. But sometimes humans can be so demanding that they wipe the animals' habitats irredeemably.

One might ask: 'Why does a nation, which boasts of its prosperity need to conquer the precious habitats of other living creatures? Why do those animals have to retreat and become endangered – if it is not essential?'

No one has an incontrovertible right to pursue his or her own agenda and sacrifice the interests of other living creatures. Each species has its own exclusive qualities, which other creatures cannot match entirely.

(The Icelanders have certainly recognised their responsibilities in this respect and, whenever large-scale construction works are being planned, an environmental assessment is prepared, where the interests of human society are balanced against the interests of animals, vegetation and Nature. In order to create balance and fairness between the parties, an effort must be made to demonstrate that the special interests of particular species – such as reindeer, geese or seals in their natural habitats – may in certain cases weigh as much and sometimes even more than the special interests of the human population.)

A friend of mine once told me a story. In the summer of 1999 he and some colleagues requested permission from the Roads and Highways Authority to drive along mountain roads in the Kárahnjúkar area north of the huge Vatnajökull glacier (the largest ice-cap in all Europe). These roads had not yet been opened to public traffic. They were granted permission, but only on condition that they showed particular respect for the fauna, that they did not disturb reindeer or geese or any other birds, and under no circumstances harmed the vegetation. My friend and his colleagues obeyed, and walked carefully and cautiously along the dim, dramatic canyons.

Today, in this same area, there are hundreds of people engaged in noisy construction work, and the birds and reindeer flee from thunderous heavy-duty machinery on the rampage in the quest for society's economic recovery. Is this not a strange reversal? Were the interests of humans so great that the interests of the animals had to give way? Why should the interests of human society always weigh more heavily than the vital interests of other species?

Should land be protected for its aesthetic appeal? Is beauty sufficient cause? The beauty of the land for a person is not only what the eye can see but also what all the senses perceive. But the beauty of Nature is not only perceived by the senses – it also contains a hidden beauty, which reveals itself only slowly. Beauty, which disappears under the onslaught of human enterprises, can be a sanctuary for unspoilt nature: heath vegetation, reindeer, geese, foxes, moorland birds and migrants. Knowledge of the story and the subject can deepen this beauty even more.

But how heavily does such beauty weigh? Valuable beauty may perhaps strengthen and promote the economy of the land and have a positive impact on regional development if people want to enjoy this beauty. Beauty is no more subjective as an asset than many other factors; the beauty of Nature is in reality an economic resource.

Let us start, at least, with the proposition that beauty, which vanishes, may have an unusually high value. In that event, the economic value must, on balance, be very high in order to justify the destruction of such

beauty; thus the beauty, which vanishes, may be of more value than what is gained in return.

The thread I am following here goes all the way back to the Beginning, as can be seen in *Völuspá* (Sibyl's Prophecy) which all of us from the Nordic countries know from school in the old days. In the Beginning people treated themselves and one another and their environment so cruelly that the world was destroyed:

The Sun grows dark,
Earth sinks in the sea,
the bright stars
fall from the skies.
Flames rage
and fires leap high;
Heaven itself
is seared by heat.

Then the earth is born again and the poetry becomes a thing of beauty itself; it is a paean to the Nature, which all people, at heart, want to have:

She sees arise
a second time
Earth from the sea,
green with growth.
Falls cascade,
the eagle flies high,
the one from the mountains
which stoops the fish.

The Æsir meet
on Sandy Plain,
and talk about
the World-Serpent,
call to mind
the great events,
the ancient runes
of the All-Father.

And there once again,
rare and wonderful,
found on the grass
are the golden chessmen
the gods once owned
in olden times.

Unsown fields
 will grow again;
 all ills will be cured,
 Baldr will come back.
 Baldr and Höðr,
 gods of slaughter,
 will live together
 in Óðinn's halls...

She sees a hall
 more fair than the sun,
 thatched with gold
 at Gimlé;
 and there shall the gods
 in innocence dwell,
 and live forever
 a life of bliss.

Then shall the Mighty One
 come to his Kingdom,
 the strong from above,
 who rules over all...

Looking ahead

The first Nature Conservation law in Iceland was passed in 1956. But the first stirrings in the Nordic countries were much earlier. It has long been forbidden to hunt animals on Sundays and other Holy Days, and to kill sleeping animals; animals had the right to some peace. In Norway it has been the custom for some hunters never to hunt more than they needed for the pot – any infringement would mean an end to their hunting-luck. It was showing respect for the animal kingdom, respect for the whole of Creation, and at the same time forestalling ruthless over-exploitation.

National Parks originated in the United States in the 19th century, as it became clear from scientific investigations that some animals were being driven to extinction, such as the passenger pigeon. Hot Springs in Arkansas was designated in 1832, and Yellowstone Park in 1872. Here in Iceland, Þingvellir was designated in 1928 as a national monument to Iceland's long and tormented history.

Skaftafell National Park was established in 1967 and enlarged in 1984. Under Icelandic law, National Parks can be established on state-owned land which is remarkable for its landscape, vegetation or fauna, or when a place is of such historical interest that it is considered desirable to maintain and protect its landscape and natural features. Skaftafell fulfils these requirements to the letter. It contains valley glaciers and farmland,

ice-caps and bubbling hot springs, birch woods and alpine vascular plants, insects and birds of immense diversity. Here one finds redwings, snipe, meadow pipits, wrens and bramblings; and there are huge breeding colonies of great skuas and the arctic skuas. Seals frolic along the sea-shore. Some twenty rare species of plants grow in the Park, including twayblade, maidenhair spleenwort and valerian – not to mention harebells and saxifrages.

Ladies and gentlemen: we who live in the Nordic countries are privileged to live in very special circumstances: even in densely populated areas, Nature – sometimes even virgin Nature – is always just around the corner. We share a common heritage, a common inheritance of language and history and identity; we are surely ideally placed for planning a joint defense of our treasured environment. If the Nordic countries cannot do it, who can?

No one pretends it is an easy business. In these days of headlong change, finding the right balance between conflicting interests will be enormously difficult. No single nation can do it on its own, for nature conservation brooks no boundaries. Nor does pollution. Biodiversity is universal, and cannot be limited to fortified bastions of no-go areas.

The Nordic countries have decided to halt the contraction of biodiversity by the year 2010? Will we achieve that target? And how will we combat the greenhouse effect and its consequent global warming? How can we meet the ever-escalating demand for power, without recourse to fossil fuels or compromising the environment in one way or another?

Our task is to change the mind-set of civilisation. We are not blindly opposed to progress – but we are opposed to blind progress. In a Utopian universe, perhaps, the whole wide world would be one universal National Park. We must work to enable the younger generation to understand, and to welcome, their responsibilities towards the land, and the air, and the sea around us. It is vital that we strive to open the eyes of our children in order to ensure their respect, and their love, for Nature as well as for humanity. The future of planet Earth is in their hands, and in their children's hands.