

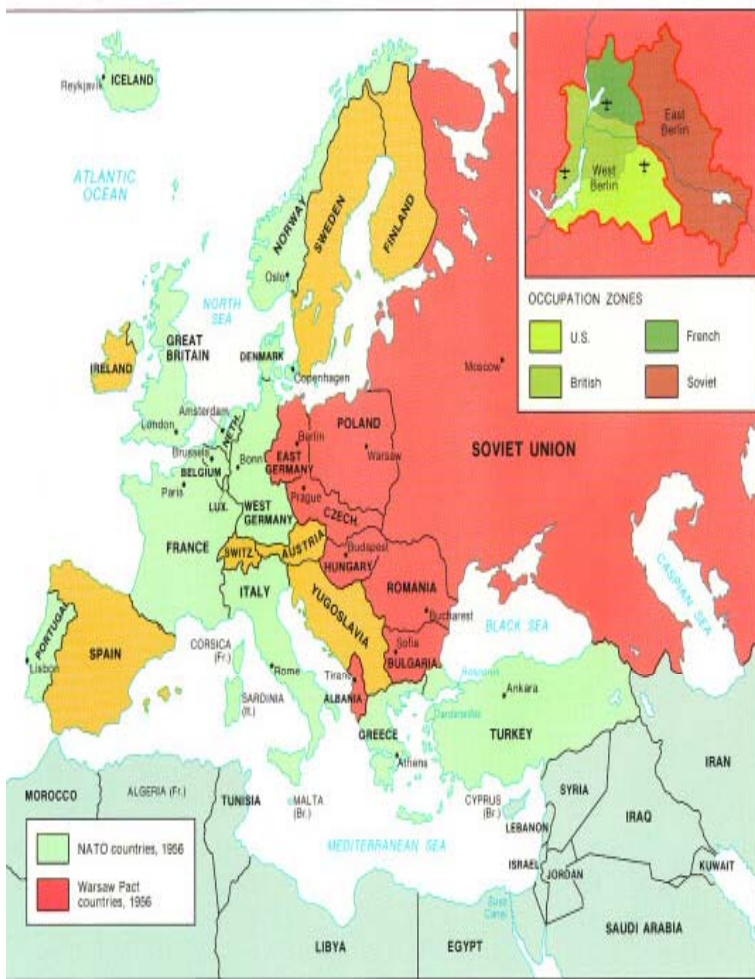
***Challenges for sustainable  
nature-based tourism: Vilsandi  
National Park, Saaremaa  
Island, Estonia***

Drs. Stuart Cottrell

Human Dimensions of Natural Resources

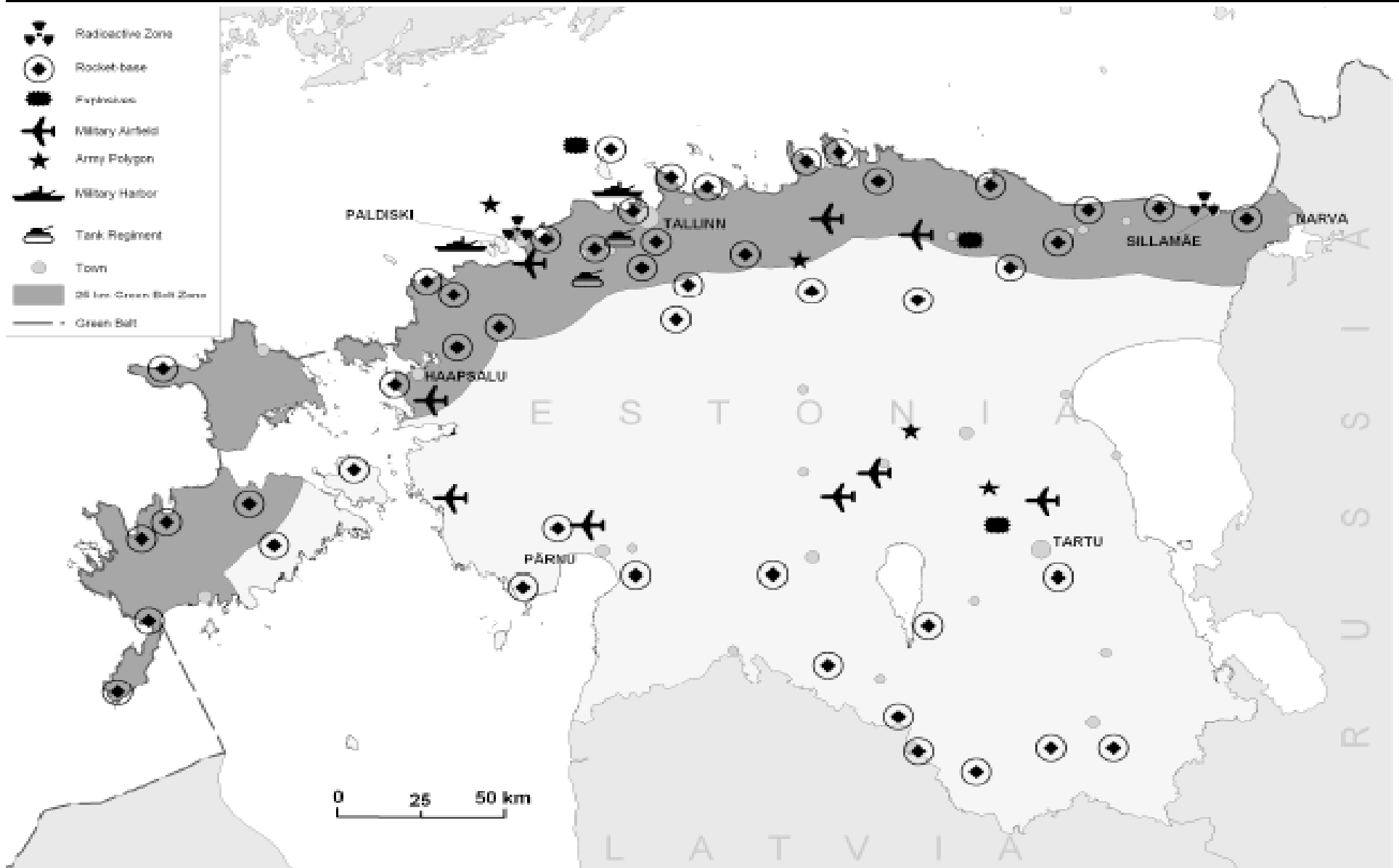
Jana Raadik-Cottrell, HDNR & Kuressaare  
College of Tallinn University of Technology

# Changing Landscapes



Cold War Europe

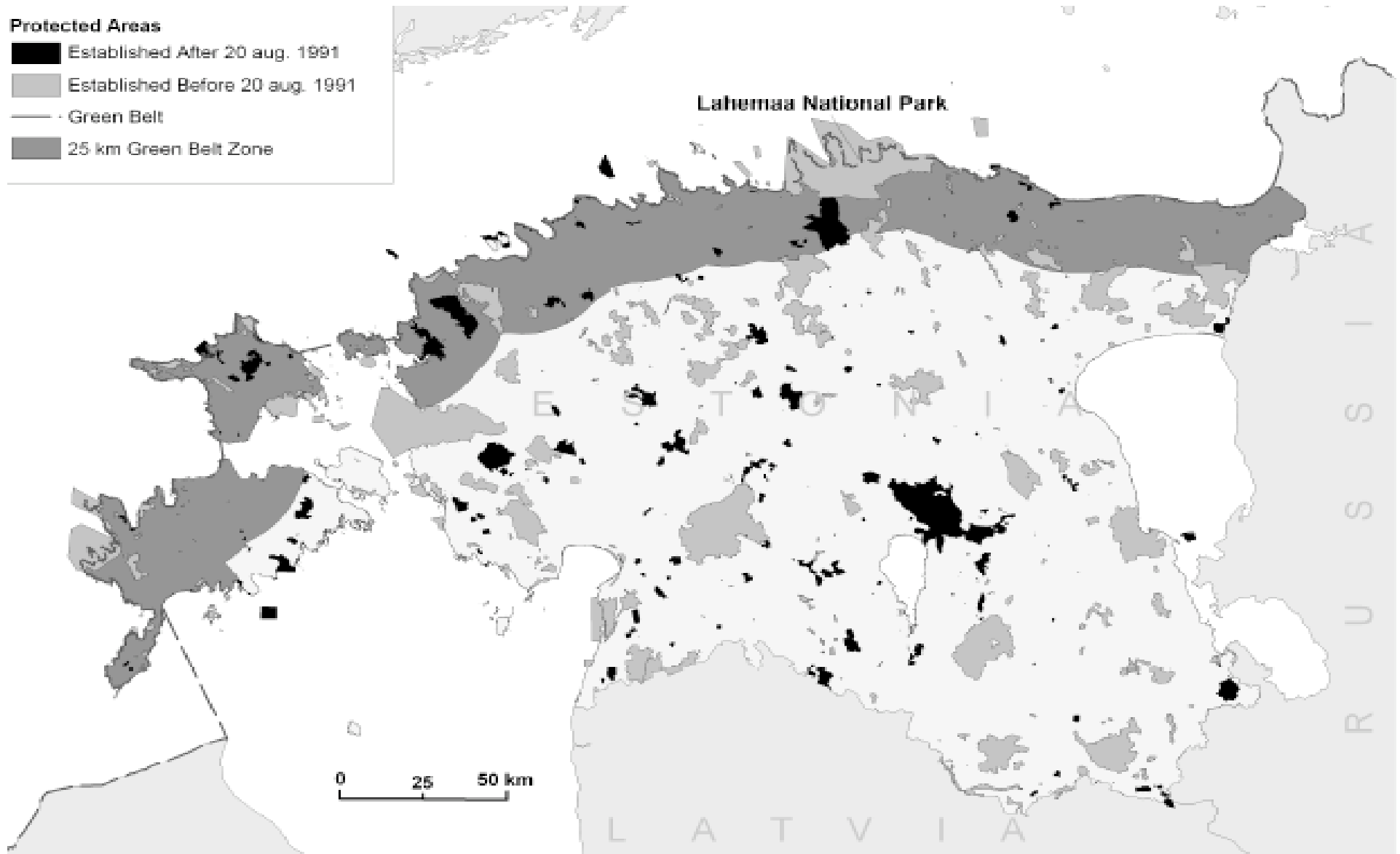
# Estonian Green Belt



# Estonian Green Belt

## Protected Areas

- Established After 20 aug. 1991
- Established Before 20 aug. 1991
- Green Belt
- 25 km Green Belt Zone



# Changing landscapes







# Tourism Development Issues for Saaremaa



# Challenges for Saaremaa

- Challenge between desired nature based tourism destination image and wish to develop larger scale tourism (golf courses, resorts, etc.)
- Spa Tourism
- Beer festivals and car races

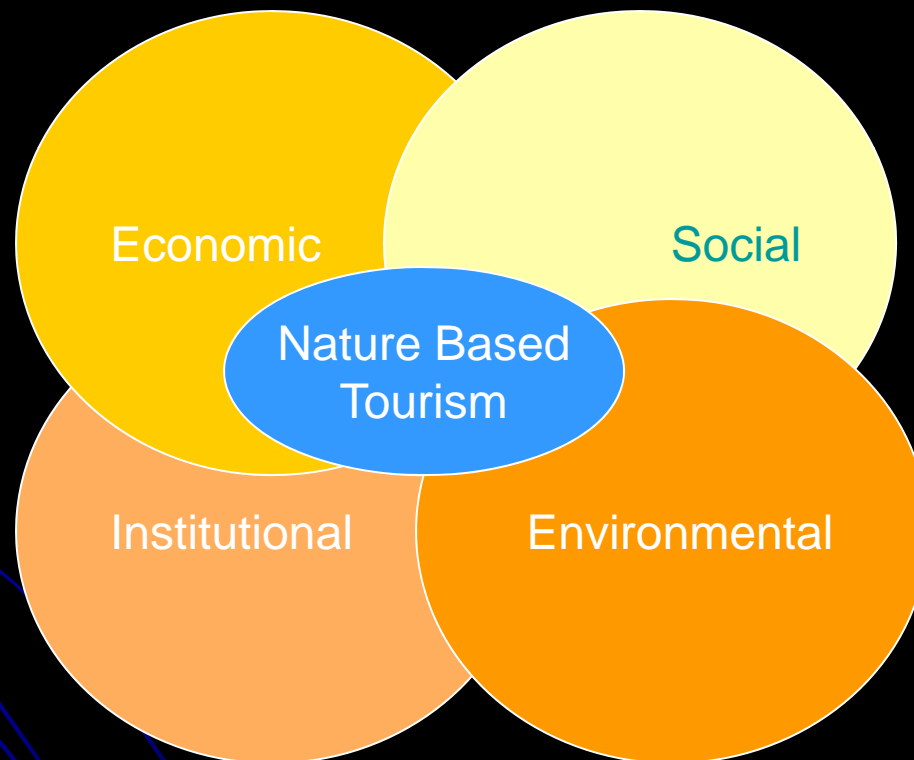




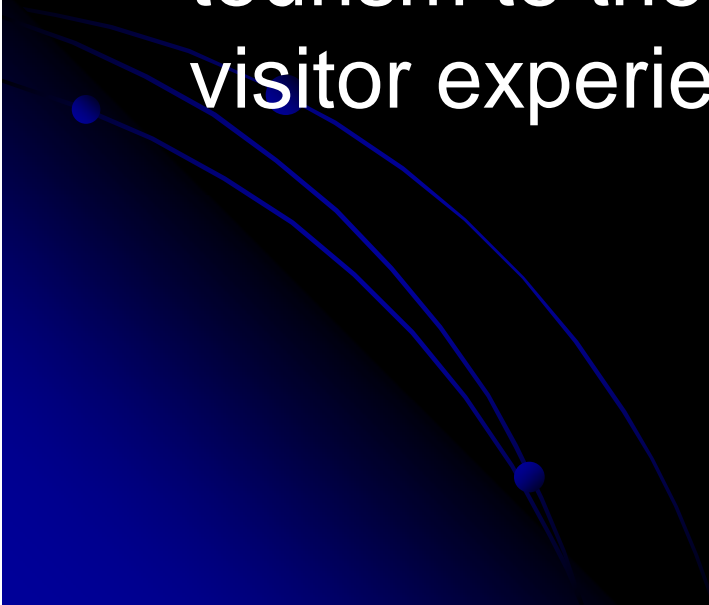
# Challenges

- Rapid development of coastal areas – with external / private interests (e.g., international ownership) - Island Destination .....
- Possible bridge link to the mainland, Deep Port development- from cruise ships to cargo

# Dimensions of Sustainability



# Purpose of the Fellowship

- to enhance Vilsandi NP and stakeholder capacity to manage nature conservation collaboratively, enhance sustainable livelihoods among tour operators via tourism to the park and to enhance the visitor experience.
- 

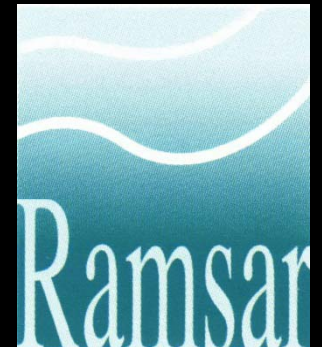
# Partners

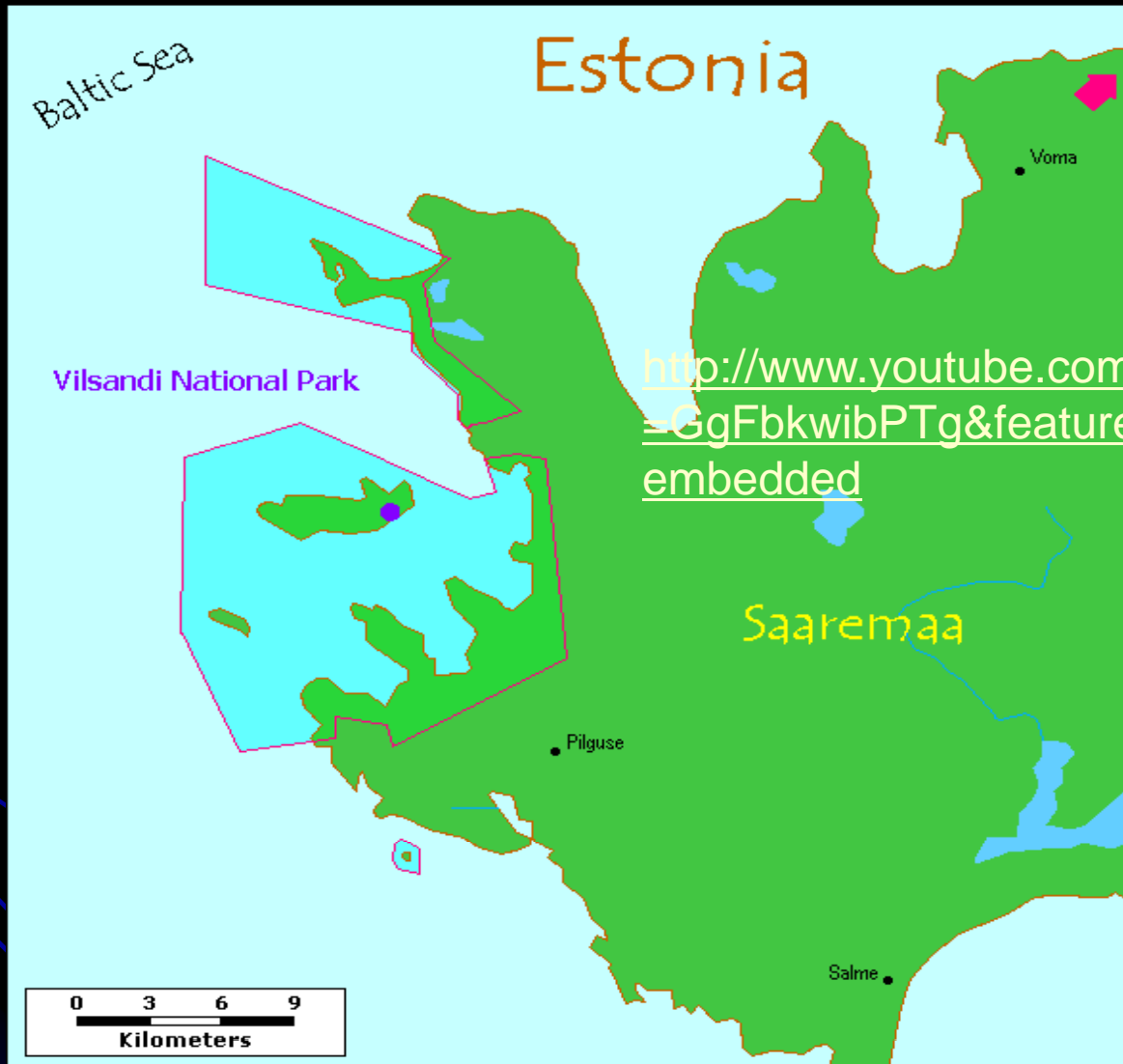
- CSU – Cottrell and CSU CCC Intern (Matt Burnam)
- Heritage Tours
- RMK - Estonian State Forest Service that manages visitor flows at Vilsandi National Park
- *Kuressaare College of Tallinn University of Technology* - Dr. Raadik-Cottrell and two interns
- Estonian Ministry of Environment
- Tourism Stakeholders



# Vilsandi National Park

- Oldest nature protection area (bird sanctuary) in Baltics (since 1910)
- Appr. 150 islands and islets
- Total area 58,811 acres w/ 40,105 acres marine area
- Ramsar, Natura 2000, Europarc, Man and Biosphere
- 250 bird species (incl. IUCN VU Steller's Eider), one of the most important gray seal 'nurseries' in Europe
- 500 specimens of mosses and lichens
- More than 200 endangered plant species





[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GgFbkwibPTg&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GgFbkwibPTg&feature=player_embedded)

0 3 6 9  
Kilometers

# Vilsandi National Park

- Has outstanding quality nature
- Has a variety opportunities for nature based tourism
- Has high visitor satisfaction
- Has a lot of visitors & that will continue to increase

More visitors means there is a need for visitor management /

Experience zones



**Islander** Marine trips in Vilsandi National Park

- Trips to island Vilsandi
- Bird observation tours
- Gray seal observation tours
- Diving trips to coral reefs and ship wrecks
- Marine trips in Vilsandi National Park's archipelago

Info : +372 51 55 100, +372 566 71 555  
[www.islander.ee/vilsandi](http://www.islander.ee/vilsandi)

The advertisement features a central image of a gray seal and a black and white bird on a rocky shore. To the right, there are three smaller inset photos: a boat with people on the water, a boat with people on the water, and a lighthouse on a small island. The background of the ad is a scenic view of a coastal area with water and greenery.







# Challenges for VNP

- a decentralized management structure, disjointed conservation plan, nor a visitor management plan
- local stakeholders not actively involved – (in process, new requirement by Ministry of Environment)

# Challenges for VNP

- A restructuring of the Estonian National Park system in 2009 abandoned the existing administration system.
- VNP management is split between a newly created Environmental Board who is responsible for nature protection and The State Forest Management Centre who oversees management of visitor services.
- Information and tourism services to the park was leased under a five year contract to Heritage Tours, a private tour operator. <http://www.parimusmatkad.ee/eng>
- These organizations manage different aspects of VNP, however with serious lack of cooperation.
- Numerous tourism operators utilize VNP for their nature based tours, yet without specific guidelines for use of the park.

# Saarte Hääl (Island Voice) story

**From:** Kertu Kalmus [mailto:[kertu.kalmus@saartehaal.ee](mailto:kertu.kalmus@saartehaal.ee)] **Sent:** Wednesday, April 27, 2011 3:00 AM  
**To:** [stuart.cottrell@colostate.edu](mailto:stuart.cottrell@colostate.edu) **Subject:** Questions from Estonia's newspaper **Importance:** High

Hello,

i'm writing to you from Estonia, from Saaremaa's daily newspaper Saarte Hääl. I heard that you are working with Vilsandi National Park and other protected-area stakeholders on Saaremaa Island, to facilitate development of a collaborative conservation plan coupled with visitor management and sustainable tourism development strategies for Vilsandi National Park to meet criteria to become a European Protected Area Network Park. We would like to write about it. Can you please tell us, what exactly is your assignment concerning to Vilsandi and other protected areas in Saaremaa? Have you been here in Saaremaa already or are you going to come in the nearest future? Who are you going to work with in here and what are you actually doing?

Looking forward to hear from you soon!

Best regards,  
Kertu Kalmus  
Saarte Hääl  
reporter

# Colorado professor asub tegelema Vilsandi

**K** Professor from Colorado will manage Vilsandi protected areas

Autor: Kertu Kalmus Reede, 29. aprill 2011

**US** Colorado University assigned its' professor of natural resources to manage the stakeholder groups involved with Vilsandi National Park and other nature **St** protected areas.

**ko** kokku puutuvate sidusgruppidega Saaremaal.

**Se** The aim is to jointly develop the plan for visitor management and sustainable tourism development strategies. The management plan is according to the su university needed to meet the requirements of European protected areas .

**K** Kaitsekava on ülikooli andmeil vajalik selleks, et Vilsandi rahvuspark vastaks

**Eu** Dr. Cottrell expressed to Saarte Hääl, that he is coming to Saaremaa already this summer to work on this project. "At this moment we are in the planning

**St** stage, thus it is too early to give more specific details." projekti pärast

**Sa** Saaremaale tulemas juba eeloleval suvel. "Hetkel oleme projekti planeerimise

• **sta** According to Cottrell the details of the management plan will be revealed to ta possible partners during project seminar, which will possibly take part either at the end of July or in the beginning of August. Until the meeting with

**Co** potential stakeholders has not taken place, the focus will be just on Vilsandi

**ko** National park and on different stakeholder groups and not so much on

**alg** European protected areas network system. aga kohtunud on, püsib projekti

**fo** fokus Cottrelli sõnul lihtsalt Vilsandi rahvuspargil ja erinevatel sidusgruppidel

**ning** ning mitte nii väga Euroopa kaitsealade võrgustiku süsteemil.



# Process

- Two meetings – July 4<sup>th</sup> and August 11<sup>th</sup>
- Onsite visitor survey
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Homeowner study

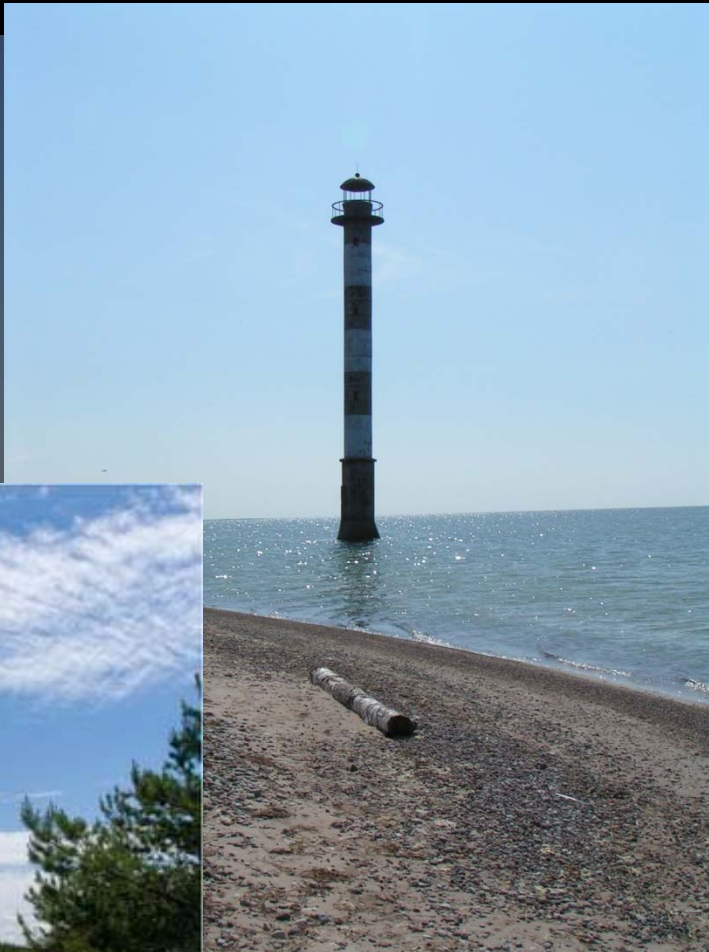
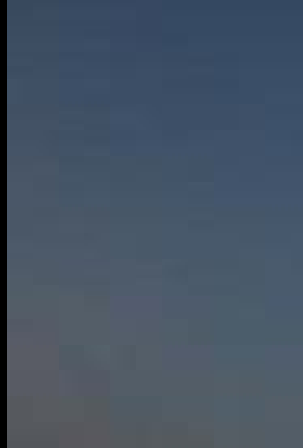


## 4<sup>th</sup> of July meeting

- Representatives from The Environmental Board and The State Forest Management Centre (RMK) met first time in person.
- New VNP nature protection management plan in process (includes visitor management issues)
- Stakeholder involvement in management plan development required by the Ministry of Environment
- RMK Visitor survey 2010

# 4<sup>th</sup> of July meeting

More than 15.000 visitors in 3 summer months



# 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting, August 11<sup>th</sup> Loona Manor





# VNP Visitor Center



# August 11<sup>th</sup> meeting





RMK loodushoiuposakonna tegevus loodusalade majandamisel

Visitor Survey

Visitor Flow Monitoring

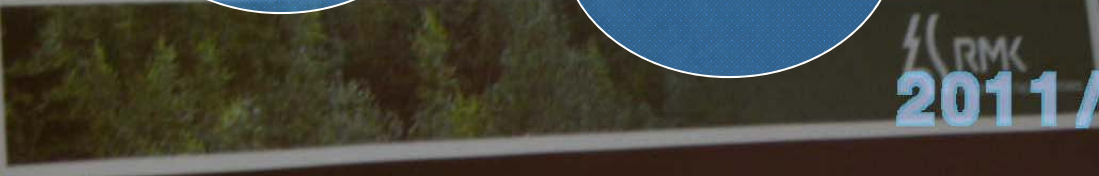
Nature Use Research

Responsibilities of State Forest Management Centre

Recreation Environmental Impacts Research

Natural Objects Monitoring

Resource Monitoring



RMK  
2011/08/09

# International Visitor Survey

- July 9<sup>th</sup> to July 30<sup>th</sup> (12 survey days)
- Onsite survey – 72 Total
  - 25 Estonian
  - 47 International
- Interviews in June and early July
- Parking lot counts (vehicles)



# Length of Stay & First Time Visits

- Length of stay
  - On Saaremaa 2-5 days – majority (70%)
  - In Vilsandi 1-2 days (43% 2 days in park)
- First visits
  - First visit = 83%
  - Those not visiting for first time often bringing others who have not seen the park before – 37% been to park at least once

# Reasons for Visit

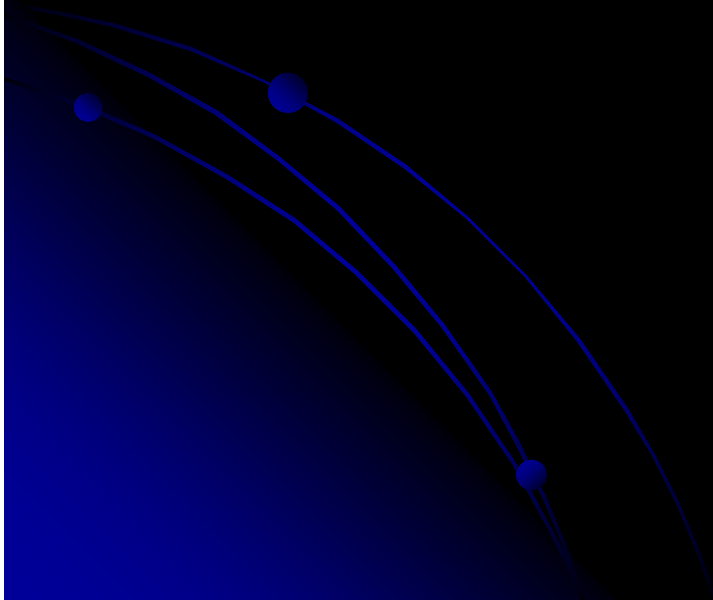
- Reasons for visiting
  - Nature (40%)
  - Bird watching (9%)
  - Wildlife (7%)
  - Touring
    - Includes car, RV, and bike
    - Bike touring becoming more popular, Saaremaa is a good location
- Wish for more signs and information in English
- Visitor like the park but don't know where to go

# Second workshop August 11<sup>th</sup>

- Comments from RMK manager about area becoming a much larger area
  - Protected areas must offer local benefits – or will lose funding
- Little community or tourism operator representatives
- Agenda – too much information and no time for discussion
- No one came to the PAN Parks meeting in September
- Limited contact since...but things happening – November announcement (Jana highlight)
- Key aspects of meeting about 2<sup>nd</sup> home owners in Lumanda group concerning for stewardship

# Second Home owner study

- In parallel to the CCC project
- Illustrates the important role of 2<sup>nd</sup> home owners for nature conservation





## SECOND HOME OWNER STUDY

### Reasons to Have Second Home in Saare County

	n	Mean	Std
Safe environment	211	4.47	.69
Proximity to the sea	209	4.24	1.00
Pristine nature	211	4.61	.60
Insularity	206	4.18	1.04
Privacy	209	4.39	.81
Social environment	207	3.73	1.01
Roots	212	3.92	1.42
Recreational opportunities	207	3.81	1.11
Good investment	206	2.84	1.41
Other	41	4.07	1.37

## Interest with and Current Level of Engagement with Local Community Cont.-d

	Level of Interest			Current Engagement			
	n	No %	Yes %	n	Never %	Occasionally %	Regularly %
Assisting with grant writing to aid local development	205	67.8	32.2	211	89.6	10.0	0.5
Participating in village initiatives	205	41.5	58.5	210	63.3	31.4	5.2
Participating in local nature conservation initiatives	205	29.3	70.7	210	63.8	31.0	5.2
Providing financial support	204	56.4	43.6	210	75.2	21.4	3.3
Involving in local businesses	204	68.6	31.4	209	90.4	7.2	2.4
Other	14	21.4	78.6	16	56.3	25.0	18.8

# Second home owner study

- Strong opposition to inappropriate development and management of natural resources
- Interest in collaboration with local municipalities on nature protection and planning initiatives
- Lack of information and communication
- Local municipalities not interested in cooperation







# What we hope(d) for

- A set principles for sustainable tourism and nature conservation in the area with operational guidelines for the next 5 years;
- A set of priorities with regard to funding decisions and implementation of any action plans;
- The provision of guidelines for tourism stakeholders on how to develop future tourism products to Vilsandi NP that aids park conservation efforts while enhancing existing tourism stakeholder livelihoods;
- Potential tourism businesses whom could expand programs and services in nature based tourism to VNP will be identified to enhance tourism business livelihoods; and
- *Application for PAN Parks certification of VNP along with conservation and visitor management plans, and a sustainable tourism development strategy.*

# Proposed link with PAN Parks



**Initiative to improve nature protection via sustainable tourism development**

- **European network of wilderness protected areas - *ecological network***
- **Widely recognised as Europe's elite nature sites (*branding / marketing context – linked to standards of quality*)**
- **Reliable trademark for conservation and sustainable tourism based on independent verification – *principles for development***

# PAN Parks Principles, Criteria and Indicators

## Two phase verification process

### Phase 1 Verification

- Principle 1: Rich Natural Heritage
- Principle 2: Nature Management
- Principle 3: Visitor Management

### Phase 2 Verification

- Principle 4: (STDS)  
Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy
- Principle 5: Partnerships









Oulanka  
National  
Park

Fulufjället  
National  
Park

Sooma NP

Vilsandi  
NP



# What makes PAN Parks unique?

## Principle 4

## Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy

&

## Principle 5 Business Partners

*External perspective – NO Park is  
an island*



# The goal



To ensure guaranteed protection of  
**1 million hectares of wilderness**  
in Europe by 2015



Archipelago NP © Seppo Keränen



# Wilderness partners



- can join 'The Million Project'
- sign a commitment to preserve their wilderness area
- identify the major risk of the long term preservation of their wilderness area and possible ways of cooperation with PAN Parks in protecting it

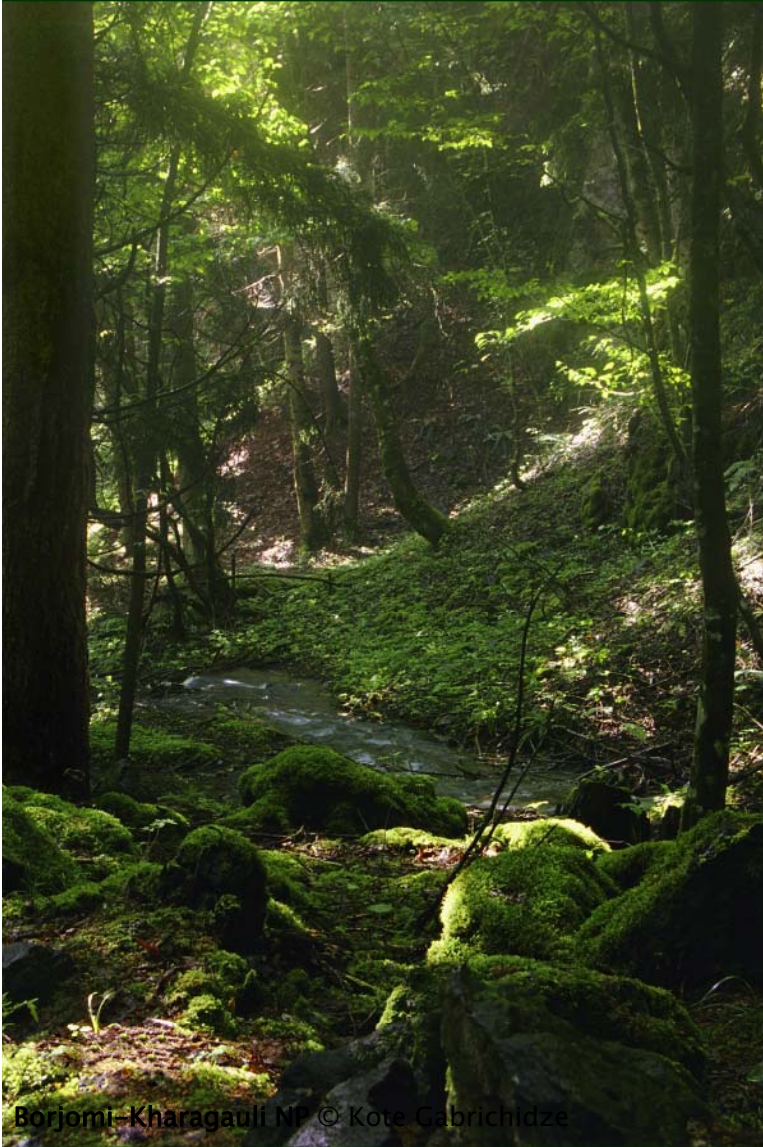


Retezat NP © Mihai Moiceanu

# Benefits of becoming a Wilderness Partner



- international recognition
- technical support in wilderness management
- support in lobbying at decision makers
- opportunity for expertise exchange



Borjomi-Kharagauli NP © Kote Gabrichidze



# Certified PAN Parks



Our wilderness partners can become certified parks if they

- have min. 10,000 ha of wilderness
  - go through third party verification
- (also sustainable tourism development strategy)



# Extra benefits for certified PAN Parks



- use of the brand (also in the field)
- marketing benefits, promotion (PAN Parks communications tools)
- enhanced cooperation with local businesses (can also be certified)
- tourism model (cooperation with international tour operators)



Retezat NP ©iStock/Falk Kienas

# Vilsandi National Park

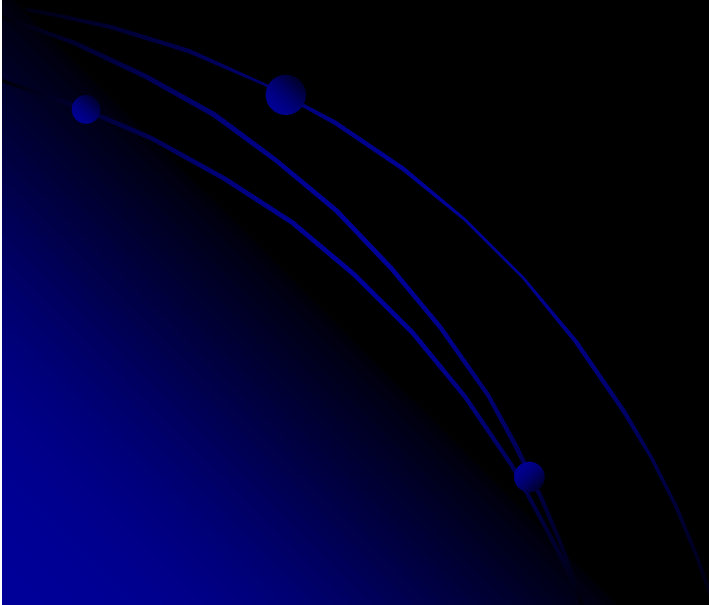
- Can become a PAN Park Wilderness Member – ONLY if locals want this
- Can use visitor management, sustainable tourism and business partner principles from PAN Parks
- Sustainable tourism networks – partnerships to be strengthened
- Enhance visitor satisfaction = benefits to locals

# What next

- Research needs (*Mariliis Leitud*) – *Nature trails – all on Saaremaa*
- Visitor management needs
- Zoning needs
- Facilities needs
- Information provision needs
- Stakeholder group – to link conservation with sustainable nature tourism development
- Communication and collaboration!!!

# Follow up work

- Meetings this summer
- Interviews with municipalities, tourism stakeholders, and 2<sup>nd</sup> homeowners in Lumanda parish





Thank you! (Tänan!)  
Questions???

