

# Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy for Oulanka National Park 2011



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Cover photo: Oulanka's suspension bridges lead visitors into a world of unforgettable experiences.  
Photo: Mylene van der Donk



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# **Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy for Oulanka National Park 2011**



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ABSTRACT	<p>Oulanka National Park is located in a region of NE Finland that is important for tourism, midway between the tourism centres of Ruka-Kuusamo and Salla. Thanks to its unique natural features, diverse facilities, and a long history and strong image as a destination for hiking and outdoor activities, the park is popular both in terms of visitor numbers and as a regional tourist attraction. The park welcomes almost 170,000 visitors annually. Visitors' spending boosted the local economy by an estimated 15 million euros in 2010.</p> <p>This sustainable tourism development strategy aims to assess the factors that attract visitors to the park, examine the current state of tourism in Oulanka, and define objectives for the future. The strategy is also a response to the challenge set by the surrounding Kuusamo Lapland tourism region that Oulanka National Park should encourage the growth and internationalisation of tourism as part of the region's efforts to become more of a year-round destination.</p> <p>As visitor numbers grow, it is vital to ensure that this increase and related developments remain sustainable. Sustainability is to be monitored using a method known as "limits of acceptable change". The latest surveys indicate that recreational activities and nature tourism have not endangered the national park's natural values or reduced visitors' levels of satisfaction. Measures to promote sustainability include structures designed to prevent erosion, measures to channel visitors' movements, communications work, and cooperation with stakeholder groups.</p> <p>Attractions that offer unforgettable experiences in unspoilt natural settings like Oulanka National Park play a vital role in the context of increases in nature tourism, summer tourism, and the importance of national parks. The Russian frontier runs along the eastern edge of Oulanka National Park, and just over the border lie attractions including Russia's Paanajärvi National Park, representing huge potential for cross-border nature tourism. Oulanka National Park already collaborates closely with its twin park Paanajärvi.</p> <p>Oulanka National Park intends to become a major asset for tourism in NE Finland as the region's most important national and international attraction. To achieve this, local actors must collaborate effectively on national and international communications work, and on issues including trails, visitor centres and other facilities. In the context of services and activities the emphasis will not be on expansion, but on enhancing the impacts of existing facilities.</p> <p>This sustainable tourism development strategy has been drafted simultaneously with a new management plan for Oulanka National Park. The necessary data was compiled through surveys of visitors and local businesses in 2009, and through close collaboration with stakeholders. The strategy has been produced by the Oulanka Cooperation Group, which is made up of representatives of the park's key stakeholders.</p>		
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JULKAISUN NIMI	Oulangan kansallispuiston luontomatkailusuunnitelma 2011		
TIIVISTELMÄ	<p>Oulangan kansallispuisto sijaitsee matkailullisesti tärkeällä alueella Ruka-Kuusamon ja Sallan matkailukeskuksien puolivälissä. Ainutlaatuinen luonto yhdistettynä vahvaan retkeilyperinteesseen, monipuolisiin palveluihin ja eläviin mielikuviin tekee kansallispuistosta suositun käyntikohteen ja alueen matkailun vetovoimatekijän. Puistossa vierailee vuosittain lähes 170 000 kävijää ja kävijöiden rahankäytön paikallistaloudelliset vaikutukset nousivat 15 miljoonaan euroon vuonna 2010.</p> <p>Luontomatkailusuunnitelman tehtävänä on kartoittaa kansallispuiston luontomatkailun vetovoimatekijät ja nykytila sekä määrittää sen tulevaisuuden tavoitteet. Luontomatkailusuunnitelmalla Oulangan kansallispuisto vastaa sitä ympäröivän Kuusamo Lapland -matkailualueen asettamaan haasteeseen matkailun kasvun, kansainvälistymisen ja ympärivuotisuuden kehittämiseksi.</p> <p>Matkailijamäärien kasvaessa luontomatkailun ehdoton edellytys on sen kasvun ja kehityksen kestävyys. Kansallispuiston kestävyyttä seurataan ”hyväksyttävän muutoksen rajat” -menetelmällä, ja viimeisten mittauksen mukaan retkeily ja luontomatkailu eivät ole vaarantaneet kansallispuiston luontoarvoja tai heikentäneet kävijätyytyväisyyttä. Kestävyyttä edistetään mm. kulumista estävillä rakenteilla, käytönohjauksella, viestinnällä ja sidosryhmien kanssa tehtävällä yhteistyöllä.</p> <p>Luontomatkailun suosion vakiintuessa, kesämatkailun lisääntyessä ja kansallispuistojen merkityksen kasvaessa osana kestävää matkailua Oulangan kansallispuiston kaltainen unohtumattomia luontoelämyksiä tarjoava erämaan ihmeiden tiivistymä on vahvoilla. Puistoon idässä rajautuvat Venäjä ja Paanajärven kansallispuisto omaavat valtavan potentiaalin rajat ylittävälle luontomatkailulle. Jo nyt Oulangan kansallispuisto toimii tiiviissä yhteistyössä Paanajärven kansallispuiston kanssa.</p> <p>Oulangan kansallispuiston tavoitteena on olla Koillis-Suomen matkailun voimavara ja tärkein kansallinen ja kansainvälinen vetovoimatekijä. Tavoitetilan saavuttaminen vaatii alueen toimijoilta yhteisiä toimenpiteitä viestinnässä, reitistöissä ja palveluvarustuksessa, luontokeskuksen rooleissa, yhteistyössä ja kumppanuudessa sekä kansainvälisyydessä. Palvelujen ja toiminnan lisäämisen sijaan keskitytään niiden vaikuttavuuden vahvistamiseen.</p> <p>Suunnitelma on laadittu samanaikaisesti Oulangan kansallispuiston hoito- ja käyttösuunnitelman kanssa. Suunnittelussa tarvittavaa tietoa on kerätty vuonna 2009 toteutetuilla Oulangan kansallispuiston kävijä- ja yritystutkimuksilla sekä tiiviillä sidosryhmäyhteistyöllä. Suunnitelman laatimisesta vastaa puiston keskeisistä sidosryhmistä koostuva Oulangan yhteistoimintaryhmä.</p>		
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SAMMANDRAG	<p>Oulanka nationalpark ligger på ett för turismen viktigt område ungefär halvvägs mellan turistcentrumen Ruka-Kuusamo och Salla. Den unika naturen i kombination med de starka traditionerna inom friluftsliv, de mångsidiga tjänsterna och de levande föreställningarna om området har gjort nationalparken till ett populärt besöksmål och en attraktionsfaktor för områdets turism. Nationalparken har årligen nästan 170 000 besökare, och besökarnas inverkan på den lokala ekonomin steg till 15 miljoner euro år 2010.</p> <p>Syftet med naturturismplanen är att kartlägga naturturismens attraktionsfaktorer och nuvarande tillstånd i nationalparken samt att uppställa de framtida målen för naturturismen i nationalparken. Oulanka nationalpark vill med sin naturturismplan svara på det omgivande Kuusamo Lapland-turistområdets utmaning att öka turismens tillväxt och internationalisering och att främja äretruntturism.</p> <p>Ett absolut villkor för naturturismen när antalet turister växer är att tillväxten och utvecklingen är hållbar. Naturturismens hållbarhet i nationalparken följs upp med metoden ”limits of acceptable change”, och enligt de senaste mätningarna har friluftsliv och naturturism inte äventyrat parkens naturvärden eller minskat besökarbelåtenheten. Hållbarheten främjas bland annat med hjälp av konstruktioner som hindrar slitage, styrning av användningen, informationsspridning och samarbete med intressegrupper.</p> <p>När naturturismen blir allt mer etablerad, sommarturismen växer och nationalparkernas betydelse som en del av den hållbara turismen ökar, har Oulanka nationalpark som erbjuder oförglömliga upplevelser i en äkta ödemarksmiljö ett gott försprång. Parken gränsar österut till Ryssland och Paanajärvi nationalpark och dessa har en enorm potential vad gäller gränsöverskridande naturturism. Redan i dag är samarbetet mellan Oulanka nationalpark och Paanajärvi nationalpark tätt.</p> <p>Målet för Oulanka nationalpark är att vara en viktig resurs för turismen i nordöstra Finland och den viktigaste attraktionsfaktorn nationellt och internationellt sett. För att man ska uppnå målen krävs gemensamma åtgärder mellan aktörerna på området när det gäller information, leder och serviceutrustning, naturumets roll, samarbete, samarbetspartners och internationella frågor. Man kommer att koncentrera sig på att öka tjänsternas och verksamhetens genomslagskraft i stället för att utöka antalet tjänster och verksamheten.</p> <p>Planen har utarbetats samtidigt med skötsel- och användningsplanen för Oulanka nationalpark. De uppgifter som behövdes för planeringen insamlades med hjälp av år 2009 gjorda besökar- och företagsundersökningar samt genom tätt samarbete med intressentgrupperna. En samarbetsgrupp för Oulanka nationalpark, som består av representanter för parkens viktigaste intressentgrupper, ansvarade för utarbetandet av planen.</p>		
NYCKELORD	Oulanka, nationalpark, naturturismplan		
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# 1 Introduction

Nature-based tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors of tourism, and is seen as one of the few ways to maintain the vitality of remote rural areas in Finland (Ympäristöministeriö 2002). A considerable part of nature-based tourism focuses on national parks and their immediate surroundings. In many localities around Finland national parks lie at the heart of positive regional developments and tourism branding (Puhakka 2007). As the authority responsible for managing national parks and other protected areas in Finland, Metsähallitus strives in line with its own strategy to support regional tourism. This involves the provision by Metsähallitus Natural Heritage Services of suitable facilities at sustainable levels, and the development of related services in collaboration with the tourism industry. National parks are very much part of Finland's image, serving to increase both Finland's attractiveness as a destination for international tourism, and domestic nature-based tourism.

This sustainable tourism development strategy is linked to a wider framework that has been variously defined. In the context of this strategy *sustainable tourism means tourism that is economically viable, but does not destroy the resources on which the future of tourism will depend, notably the physical environment and the social fabric of the host community* (Swarbrooke 1999). In the planning and development of sustainable tourism, attention is paid to its economic, socio-cultural and ecological sustainability in the short and long term, and at different regional scales (Saarinen 1998).

Another key concept in this strategy is *nature-based tourism*. There is as yet no universally accepted overall definition of nature-based tourism. In this strategy nature-based tourism is understood as it has been defined in Finland's VILMAT programme for the development of nature-based tourism and the recreational use of the natural environment (Valtioneuvosto 2003): "*Nature-based tourism means all tourism based on the natural environment. Defined more narrowly, nature-based tourism is tourism where people enjoy recreation in natural environments. Nature-based tourism combines the recreational use of the natural environment and tourism. In nature-based tourism, nature itself is a considerable attraction or setting. All aspects of the recreational use of the natural environment except daily recreational activities in the vicinity of people's homes can be defined as nature-based tourism, including the use of holiday homes and recreational activities enjoyed in their surroundings.*"

This strategy aims to promote sustainable nature-based tourism. Oulanka National Park's first such strategy was defined in 1999, and updated in 2004 (Metsähallitus 2004). This new strategy further updates the strategy published in 2004. The Kuusamo Lapland tourism region around Oulanka aims to grow through increased international tourism, and find new ways to strengthen year-round tourism. Tourist numbers grew steeply in the early 2000s, but then levelled off following the global recession. This provides an opportunity before an envisaged new phase of growth to consider what kinds of nature-based tourism are sustainable – not just economically, but also ecologically and socio-culturally. If Oulanka really is a place that "everyone should see before they die", how should the park's management ensure that visitors' expectations will be fulfilled?

The Oulanka Cooperation Group has steered the preparation of this strategy and approved its publication in February 2011. The strategy has been compiled by senior advisor Sari Alatossava of Metsähallitus Natural Heritage Services, supported by senior advisor Matti Tapaninen. The information on which the strategy is based was compiled from sources including surveys conducted in 2009 among visitors to the Oulanka National Park and local partner entrepreneurs. A ten-year management plan for the park has been produced simultaneously. This sustainable tourism development strategy will next be updated in approximately 2015.

## 2 Scope and Objectives

The spatial scope of this strategy is defined at three levels:

1. Oulanka National Park and nearby areas
2. The regional (Kuusamo Lapland) and national level
3. International cooperation

The primary scope of this strategy encompasses the Oulanka National Park and the villages, settlements and other protected areas in its vicinity. The park is located within one of Finland's most important and popular tourism regions (Ruka-Kuusamo and Sallatunturi), which is such an extensive region that in this strategy the focus on issues such as descriptions of the area and environmental impact assessments has been limited to the national park.

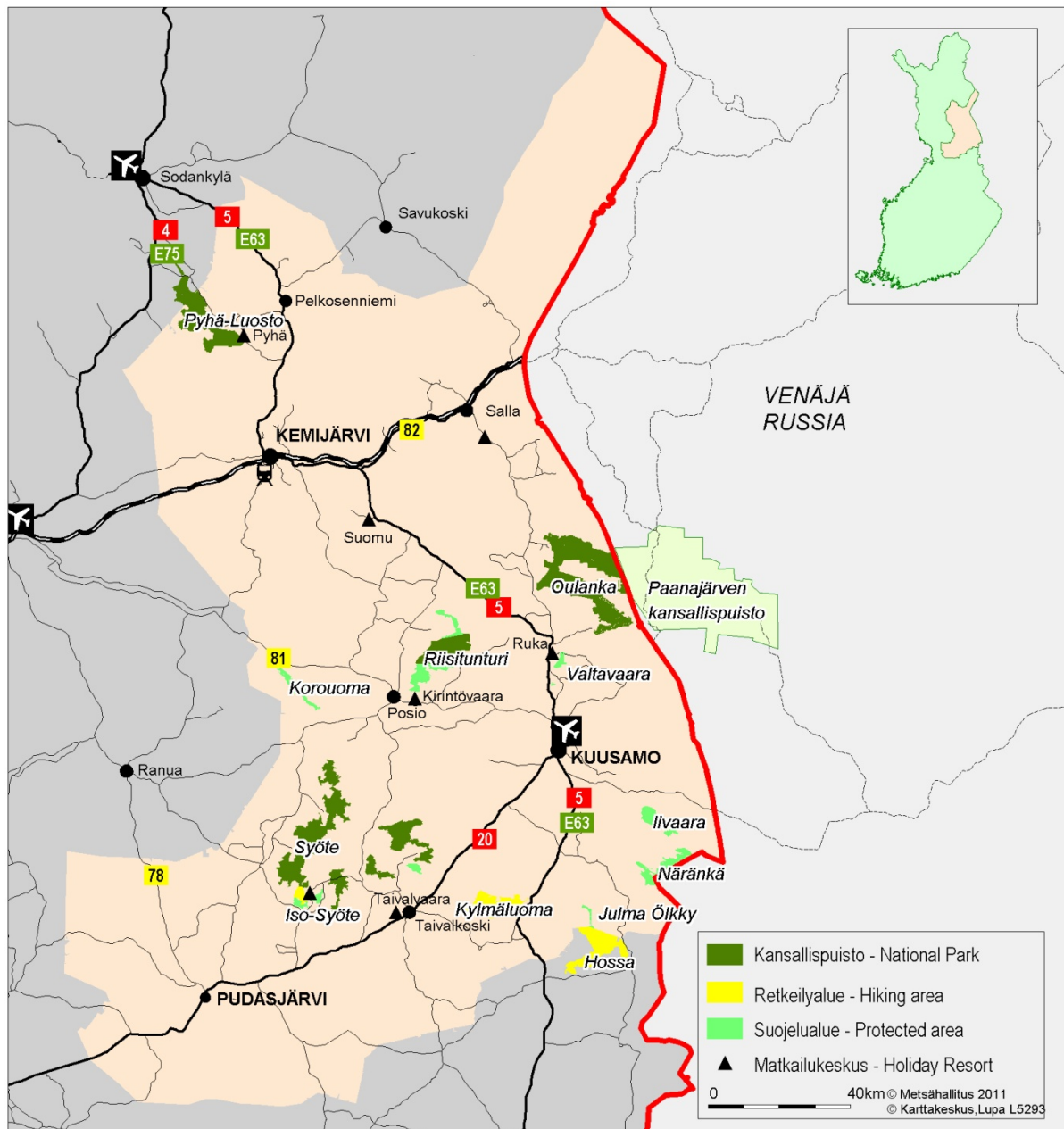
The framework for the regional development of enterprise has been set out in the Regional Cohesion and Competitiveness Programme (COCO) led by the regional development agency for NE Finland Naturpolis Ltd (Naturpolis 2011a). One goal of this programme is to rapidly increase and internationalise tourism in the region, and to this end a strategy for the internationalisation of tourism in Kuusamo Lapland has recently been updated to serve until 2013 (Naturpolis 2011b). The Kuusamo Lapland region includes the municipalities of Kuusamo, Taivalkoski, Posio, Salla, Puodasjärvi and Kemijärvi, and the tourist resort of Pyhä. A common factor shared by these localities is their location within the sphere of influence of Kuusamo Airport (see Figure 1).

In addition to this regional perspective, the strategy is also affected by the national park's national and international dimensions. As the national authority responsible for managing the recreational use of protected areas, Metsähallitus has coherent, nationally applied procedures covering issues including the monitoring of visitors, the principles of sustainable nature tourism, cooperation on tourism, and the monitoring of sustainability.

Oulanka National Park collaborates closely with its sister park on the other side of the Finnish-Russian national border, Paanajärvi. This cooperation is working towards a vision defined for 2015, by which time it is hoped that the two parks will be officially recognised as twin parks, applying similar administrative and management principles.

At the European level, Oulanka National Park forms part of the PAN Parks network, which has been established to protect Europe's last wildernesses. Oulanka became a certified PAN Park in 2002, and certification was supplemented in 2004 with a set of officially defined principles on nature tourism and cooperation with businesses. Paanajärvi National Park became a certified PAN park in 2005. Also in 2005, Oulanka and Paanajärvi were jointly granted EUROPARC's "Transboundary Parks" certification. The twin parks' next goal is to be recognised as a jointly certified cross-border PAN Park in 2012.

This strategy aims to define and promote nature-based tourism in Oulanka National Park as part of the wider development of tourism in the Kuusamo Lapland region, while ensuring that natural and cultural values are not endangered. The strategy sets out the present state of nature-based tourism in the area, a vision for a future desired state of nature-based tourism, and a development plan including actions towards this goal. This strategy also meets the requirements defined by the PAN Parks Foundation for sustainable tourism development strategies (STDS) (PAN Parks Foundation 2008). It will serve as a toolbox containing measures for developing the national park over the next five years.



**Figure 1.** Oulanka National Park and other protected areas of significance to tourism in the context of the Kuusamo Lapland tourism region (shaded pale brown). © Metsähallitus 2011, © Karttakeskus, Lupa L593.

## 3 Operating Environment

Finland's national tourism strategy for 2020 (Työ- ja elinkeinoministeriö 2010) encourages the promotion of tourism sectors, and sees tourism overall as having a significant multiplying effect on the national economy and employment, which will bring areas wealth, well-being and good potential for further growth. The strategy particularly spotlights three crucial trends: increasing environmental awareness; the growing significance of the Internet; and the fragmentation of customer groups.

### 3.1 Trends in Nature-based Tourism

Nature-based tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors within tourism. Key factors supporting nature-based tourism and the recreational use of natural areas include values associated with natural environments, local cultures and health. The popularity of voluntary work and efforts to make tourism sustainable also reflect a growing wider trend related to an increasing sense of global community. Travellers are becoming more conscientious and willing to make choices that affect important issues and add significance to their own lives (Lapin liitto 2010). The significance of individuality is increasing at the expense of mass tourism destinations and mass products. Local colour and authenticity are also becoming more important. Consumers' awareness and critical thinking are also on the rise, and responsibility in the sense of making choices that support sustainable development is becoming a stronger value in consumption. In nature-based tourism people are now looking for health-enhancing impacts as well as experiences for their own sake. Physical and spiritual well-being can often be obtained in the same package through recreational activities in natural settings (Kajaanin ammattikorkeakoulu 2010).

National parks attract various kinds of client groups, who have different desires and needs with regard to their visits. The socio-economic structure of the population is changing, and increasing numbers of elderly visitors can be found among travellers. Such visitors are ready and willing to learn and try out new experiences, even when their physical capacities begin to be limited (Kajaanin ammattikorkeakoulu 2010). Outdoor activities are no longer the preserve of self-sufficient lone wanderers, and new visitors with little or no experience of outdoor activities can be found on the easiest routes provided for day-trippers in national parks. Oulanka National Park has also been increasingly visited during the winter in recent years by people who have learnt that the natural environment can be accessible all year round. Snowshoeing activities have particularly made getting around in the winter easier than ever before.

In addition to accounting for such trends, this strategy and the measures it contains also reflects the importance given in regional tourism strategies to the national park's potential for promoting year-round tourism (Kuusamo Lapland kansainvälistymisstrategia 2013; and Lapin matkailustrategia 2011–2014). These strategies recognise the national park's great potential for responding to current trends in tourism such as increased environmental awareness, sustainable development, well-being and downshifting.

### 3.2 Key Actors and Strategies

Local tourism associations are among the most important actors in tourism at municipal level. They take responsibility for the local development of tourism, and particularly organise the marketing of tourism. Two such local actors, **Ruka-Kuusamo Tourism Association** and **Matkalle Sallaan ry** have been operating since the early 2000s, with Metsähallitus/Oulanka National Park

as a member of both organisations. The marketing of Salla as being “In the middle of nowhere” has turned the municipality’s remote location into an asset, while the marketing of Ruka Kuusamo has focused on expertise related to nature, through the themes “Green adventures” and “Nature’s own amusement park”.

One particularly important actor for Oulanka National Park is the **Oulanka Cooperation Group**, which is responsible for the drafting of this strategy. Established in 2002, the group’s members include the municipal councils of Kuusamo and Salla, residents of the villages of Hautajärvi and Käylä, the local tourism associations, the local nature conservation NGO Kuusamon luonnonystävät ry, and Metsähallitus. The group serves as an advisory body in the context of the management of Oulanka National Park, as a channel for publicity and communications, and as the Local PAN Park Group. Its functions are set out in detail in the group’s Founding Charter (Appendix 1).

Recognised critical success factors for the **Kuusamo Lapland tourism region** alongside the area’s established ski resorts and guaranteed winter snow cover include nature, the area’s national parks and expertise related to nature. The regional development agency’s updated strategy extending to 2013 (Naturpolis 2011b) emphasises the need to develop summer season tourism, but the concept of year-round nature-based tourism services is also considered to be of great interest to foreign visitors. Long-awaited collaboration with the Lapland region has now finally been initiated, with the Kuusamo Lapland and Lapland regions jointly running the “Lapland – North of Finland” branding campaign during the period 2011–2013.

Respect for nature is one of the central values behind the **Lapland tourism strategy 2011–2014** (Lapin liitto 2010): “Lapland’s nature provides settings for enjoyable experiences, and tourism will be developed in accordance with the principles of ecologically, socially and culturally sustainable development.” According to the strategy, Lapland’s national parks and wilderness areas are significant attractions and resources for tourism. Growth is particularly being sought for the summer season by combining the attractions of national parks and resorts into market-driving products that meet the needs of international tourists.

At the wider regional level, this strategy aims to complement the **Tourism strategy for the Oulu Region** for 2006–2013 (Pohjois-Pohjanmaan liitto 2006), which states that tourism in the region “must succeed by providing experiences at different times of year utilising unspoilt nature, Finnish culture, and attractions established in line with the principles of sustainable tourism.”

One focus of the **Strategic master plan for NE Finland** (Kuusamon kaupunki et al. 2006) is international tourism. The plan describes a coherent tourism region of particular interest to foreign tourists, extending from the hiking areas in Taivalkoski through Southern Kuusamo and Ruka to Salla and on to the wilderness areas of Northern Salla. The plan describes a vision for 2015 of NE Finland as “a tourism region favoured by European tourists, combining natural values, nature-based tourism services and a local flavour, with superior services which are easily accessible and purchasable all year round.”

## 4 Oulanka as a Tourism Destination

“High-quality activities and experiences based on nature and sustainable tourism lie at the heart of the attractiveness of the Kuusamo Lapland region for tourism,” according to the tourism experts assigned to describe the future of tourism in the region as part of the Delfoi process run by Kajaani University of Applied Sciences (Kajaanin ammattikorkeakoulu 2010). Oulanka National Park is known for its unique and diverse natural features, its rugged landscapes, its beautiful rivers, and its renowned and highly varied hiking routes. This section of the strategy lists the attractions of Oulanka National Park as defined in collaboration with local tourism actors.

### 4.1 Wild Wonders

In an article published on 9.5.2009 the leading Finnish daily newspaper Helsingin Sanomat described Oulanka National Park as a concentration of wild wonders, when listing the park as one of nine sights in Finland that everyone should see before they die. Oulanka is closely associated with extensive wildernesses, and its natural attractions are the reasons for the park’s popularity. It hosts a uniquely diverse combination of northern, southern and eastern species. The park’s landscapes are dominated by pine forests, the valleys of large rivers with sandy banks and rocky rapids, and extensive aapa mires in the north. The Oulanka region also hosts a wide range of biotopes and species. Reasons for this include the way the area’s varied relief has been shaped over the ages, with winding rivers in deep rocky canyons, and the area’s many consequent microclimates, as well as soils enriched by the area’s varied rock types. Oulanka’s ecological features have been studied closely and are well documented. This strategy will not focus on these natural values as such, and for more information readers may refer to other publications including “Oulanka reports – publications of Oulu University’s Oulanka research station” (since 1979), “Oulangan ja Paanajärven kansallispuistot. Luonto- ja retkiopas” (National Parks Oulanka and Paanajärvi – A natural history and tour guide) (Simula & Lahti 2005), and “Crossbill Guides: Finnish Lapland including Kuusamo” (Crossbill Guides 2010).

At the heart of Oulanka National Park lies the River Oulankajoki, whose valley is one of Finland’s best loved national landscapes, featuring riverside scenery to suit all tastes. The rugged red rocks of Kiutaköngäs, the river’s raging rapids and the views over the valley from the cliffs at its edge hold a universal appeal to everyone from expert geologists to casual visitors. The bends of the River Oulankajoki illustrate instructively to visitors how a meandering river is like a living thing, gradually but constantly shifting its course.

The park may still hold many secrets, but it can also introduce many natural features and creatures to a wider audience. At Oulanka it is often easy for visitors to observe otherwise unfamiliar species that are common within the park, while some of the area’s rarest plants can be seen right alongside the park’s trails, including the beautiful calypso orchid – which appears on the national park’s emblem. All visitors can easily share in Oulanka’s natural wonders. As Esko and Paavo Suomalainen wrote after visiting Oulanka in the 1930s: *“Whoever has seen these lands, heard the sounds of their forests and the roar of their mighty waterfalls, has inevitably been entranced by the rare charms of Finland’s wildernesses!”* (Ruuttula-Vasari 2006a).

## 4.2 A Bridge to Unforgettable Experiences

A survey of visitors to Oulanka National Park in summer 2009 (Ahola & Kivistö 2010a) revealed that people come to Oulanka to enjoy the park's scenery, to experience nature, and to relax. Oulanka's main asset is its diversity: the national park offers a lot to see within a relatively small area, and attracts many different types of visitor. The park's popularity also makes it easier to get to and get around. Well-marked trails lead visitors to the main attractions, many of which are in close proximity to each other and can be easily reached within a short hike. And there is no need to leave by nightfall, thanks to the many wilderness huts provided along the Karhunkierros Trail, and the various types of accommodation offered by local firms in the park's immediate vicinity.

Many services and activities are available near the national park, which can itself easily be reached by car. Local firms offer visitors many different ways to get to know the national park and its sights: on foot, by canoe, by white-water rafting, or even on snowshoes. Oulanka National Park does indeed feel in many ways like nature's own amusement park. In addition to such activities, local firms provide a good range of accommodation and catering services. With such services available it is easy for visitors to make several day-long trips into the park from a convenient base.

People have always been regular visitors to Oulanka over the centuries. Stone Age relics, old Sámi language names, traces of former hunting and trapping activity, and the remains of riverside meadows used here into the 1960s are among the signs of historical interactions between people and nature still visible in the national park. It is hoped that in future more of Oulanka's visitors will discover examples of this rich cultural heritage in addition to the park's natural attractions.

Fishing is another activity long associated with Oulanka. The River Kitkajoki is challenging for anglers, but year after year its banks attract fishers young and old, angling for trout. It is said that any angler who comes to fish in this beautiful river will surely get hooked, even if no trout are.

## 4.3 A Park Worthy of Its Reputation

Oulanka's reputation depends on clear popular images of the park. In spite of its extensive network of trails and diverse facilities, the area gives visitors a real sense of being in the wilds. Oulanka has been visited by many thousands of hikers annually for more than half a century, and it has become a place that all Finns feel they should visit at least once in their lives. The Karhunkierros Trail is so well known that its name is becoming a byword for an epic hiking trek.

The proximity of Russia is also a strong element of Oulanka's image. Few visitors today venture over the border, but its nearness alone is exciting, since Russia remains a strange and exotic country even in the 2000s. This represents enormous potential in the form of the future joint development of nature-based tourism in the twin parks of Oulanka and Paanajärvi on either side of the border.

Many local people do not often realise the scarcity value of fresh air, clean water, safety and silence to visitors from large urban areas. Peace and unpolluted environments are together with nature the cornerstones of green tourism, even though they have not yet been widely utilised in products. It is a pleasure for people to realise that the water in which they are canoeing is safe to drink. For many people it is a great experience to enjoy natural soundscapes encompassing running water, birdsong, and old trees creaking as the wind blows through their branches, instead of the background noise of traffic and other urban sounds. And visitors in Oulanka truly have nothing to fear, since there are no rotten bridges, dangerous wild animals or angry hikers. It's also virtually impossible to get lost for long inside the park.

## 5 The Current State of Tourism at Oulanka

Oulanka has a long history as a destination for hikers. The importance to tourism in the Kuusamo region of the area now within the national park was recognised and anticipated as early as the 1930s. Hikers were interested in Oulanka long before the national park was established in 1956, and people found their way to the area's major natural attractions without marked trails until the Karhunkierros Trail began to be defined in the 1950s (Ruuttula-Vasari 2006b).

### 5.1 Demand for the National Park

The fourth survey of visitors to Oulanka National Park, conducted in summer 2009 (Ahola & Kivistö 2010a) provides up-to-date information about how long visitors stay in the park, their spending, and how satisfied they are with the park's services. Satisfaction levels are monitored at intervals of about five years among visitors to protected areas, customers using Metsähallitus's customer service points, and local businesses. Table 1 summarises findings related to visits to Oulanka National Park.

**Table 1.** Information describing the visitors and visits to the Oulanka National Park.

Breakdown of visitors by origin <sup>1</sup>		
Local residents	4 %	
Finnish tourists	88 %	
Foreign tourists	8 %	
Length of stay <sup>1</sup>		
Visits of one day or less		
Share of all visitors	69 %	
Average duration of visit	4 hours	
Overnight stays		
Share of all visitors	31 %	
Average duration of stay	4 days	
Number of visits 2010	168 849	
Visits in terms of total no. of days	228 790 <sup>2</sup>	
Visitors' average spending	95 € per visit <sup>1</sup>	
Satisfaction levels ( 1 = very dissatisfied ... 5 = very satisfied)	Oulanka (survey year)	National average <sup>3</sup>
Customer satisfaction (Visitor Centres)	4.34 (2007–2008) <sup>4</sup>	4.30
Visitor satisfaction (National Park)	4.29 (2009) <sup>1</sup>	4.11
Enterprise satisfaction with services	3.58 (2009) <sup>5</sup>	3.61

1 = Oulanka visitor survey 2009 (Ahola & Kivistö 2010a)

2 = Figure based on visitor numbers for 2010 and survey findings from 2009

3 = Calculated for all surveys conducted in Finnish protected areas in the same year (ASTA data system)

4 = Customer surveys conducted at Hautajärvi Visitor Centre 2007 (Huhtala 2008) & Oulanka Visitor Centre 2008 (Kallunki 2010)

5 = Enterprise survey in Oulanka National Park 2009 (Ahola & Kivistö 2010b)

Visitor counts are today conducted in the national park more effectively using field equipment, so visitor numbers for 2009 have been adjusted for comparability (Table 2). Visitor numbers are today probably stable or rising slightly. The latest visitor monitoring devices also provide information on which way visitors are heading, and thereby the numbers of visitors using different routes. In addition to hikers, the national park is also visited by fishers, canoeists, berry-pickers, hunters and birdwatchers whose movements may not be registered in such surveys.

**Table 2.** Numbers of visits to Oulanka National Park and its service points 2005–2010. Survey methods were improved in 2008.

Year	Numbers of visits	
	National park	Oulanka and Hautajärvi visitor centres
2010	168 849	80 429
2009	165 592	79 923
2008	162 966	74 574
2007	185 682	78 535
2006	183 115	66 399
2005	176 128	70 791

## 5.2 What the National Park Offers

Oulanka National Park has a wide variety of routes that can be used by visitors (Table 3 and Figure 2). The 90-km Karhunkierros Trail is the park's best-known route, and one of Finland's most popular trekking routes. It largely follows the two rivers that run through the park, passing most of Oulanka's main attractions. After leaving the national park, it continues southwest for about 23 km to the Valtavaara Nature Reserve and the Ruka ski resort. Surveys suggest that only about a tenth of all the park's visitors hike the whole length of the Karhunkierros Trail. Another longer hiking route, the Keroharju Trail, leads to the wildest parts of the park where hikers can enjoy fine views over extensive aapa mires.

The shorter Pieni Karhunkierros Trail is one of the park's main attractions, alongside the area around Kiutaköngäs Falls. During 2010 as many as 50,000 visitors set off along the trail, with almost 1,000 people following the route on the busiest days. In addition to its popular trails suitable for day-long hikes, the park has two thematic trails: the Rytisuo Nature Trail and the newly renovated Hiidenlampi Cultural Trail. Three trails are particularly designed for winter use by skiers and snowshoe-trekkers. Oulanka's canoeing routes are also very popular. Paddling along the gently winding lower reaches of the river is becoming a more common way for visitors to experience the national park, including many families.

**Table 3.** Oulanka National Park's routes and the facilities and attractions they pass.

Routes	Length km	Facilities and attractions
<b>Summer routes</b>		
Karhunkierros trail	90	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 10 wilderness huts, many lean-to shelters and campfire sites</li> <li>- Hautajärvi and Oulanka visitor centres</li> <li>- 5-8 suspensionbridges</li> <li>- Most of the park's sights</li> </ul>
Keroharju trail	17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wilderness hut and lean-to shelter</li> <li>- Aapa mires and esker ridges</li> </ul>
Pieni Karhunkierros trail	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wilderness hut, day-trip hut, lean-to shelter and campfire sites</li> <li>- 3 suspension bridges</li> <li>- Rapids and rocky gorges at Myllykoski, Aalokkokoski, Jyrävä &amp; Kallioportti</li> </ul>
Oulanka Canyon day-trip trail	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wilderness hut, campfire site</li> <li>- Suspension bridge</li> <li>- Oulanka Canyon</li> </ul>
Kiutaköngäs day-trip trail	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 2 campfire sites, Oulanka Visitor Centre</li> <li>- Kiutaköngäs Falls</li> </ul>
Hiidenlampi Cultural Trail	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Campfire site and informative notice boards along the trail</li> </ul>
Rytisuo Nature Trail	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Booklet to guide visitors using the trail</li> </ul>
<b>Winter routes</b>		
Rytisuo snowshoeing trail	7.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Campfire site</li> </ul>
Hiidenlampi snowshoeing trail	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Campfire site and informative notice boards</li> </ul>
Oulanka Wilderness Trail	26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Two wilderness huts and campfire sites</li> <li>- Kiutaköngäs Falls, Oulanka River</li> </ul>
<b>Canoeing routes</b>		
Oulanka River – upper reaches	13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wilderness hut and several campfire sites</li> <li>- Taivalköngäs Falls</li> </ul>
Oulanka River – lower reaches	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wilderness hut, rental cabin and campfire sites</li> </ul>



**Figure 2.** Routes and nearby facilities in Oulanka National Park. © Metsähallitus 2011, © Maanmittauslaitos 1/MML/11.

Various services are provided for visitors at Oulanka National Park's visitor centres, including exhibitions, film viewings, environmental education, personal services and cafes. Overnight visitors not staying in the park's wilderness huts or their own tents can book accommodation in the cabins by the national park's camping site, or stay in their caravans or camper vehicles in the adjoining parking areas.

Many of the national park's business partners offer their services in the park and its vicinity. Firms entering into such partnership agreements with Metsähallitus pledge to apply the principles of sustainable nature tourism in all of their activities within the national park. In 2010 the park had 32 business partners (including firms working in the Riisitunturi area and in southern Kuusamo), whose activities mainly focused on the organisation of activities for visitors to the national park, equipment rental etc. Some of these firms also offer accommodation, catering and transportation services in the vicinity of the park. The customer services available from the national park's service points and other service providers are summarised in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Other services provided in connection with Oulanka National Park.

<b>Services</b>	
Customer service points	Oulanka Visitor Centre Hautajärvi Visitor Centre Karhuntassu Customer Service Centre - Cafes run in each of these centres by local firms
Camping site	Oulanka National Park camping site - Room for up to 110 tents - Designated spaces for 20 caravans/camper vans - 10 cabins each sleeping 4 guests - Open 1st June – 31st August; in autumn by arrangement
Tourism services provided by local firms working inside the park	32 business partners (including firms in southern Kuusamo and Riisitunturi), of which 10 are also certified PAN Parks Local Business Partners. - White water rafting - Canoeing - Hiking - Snowshoe treks - Birdwatching

Oulanka is not an island with regard to nature-based tourism, and there are many other beautiful natural sights and routes in the surrounding areas. Riisitunturi National Park's new day-trip routes, routes for visitors to the Valtavaara–Pyhävaara Nature Reserve, Korouoma in Posio, protected areas in Southern Kuusamo (Iivaara, Julma Ölkky and Närängänvaara), and Kylmäluoma Hiking Area all offer additional or alternative attractions to the routes used by visitors to Oulanka. Other important nature-based tourism destinations in the Kuusamo Lapland region include the national parks of Syöte and Pyhä–Luosto, Tuntsa Wilderness Area and Hossa Hiking Area (see Figure 1, page 11).

Oulanka National Park is one of the most important tourist attractions in Salla, and the flagship attraction of the Ruka-Kuusamo region during the summer season. Oulanka has many of the region's top attractions, including untamed rivers with plentiful fish and splendid natural settings for many outdoor activities and unforgettable experiences, fully justifying the use of the marketing slogans "Nature's own amusement park" and "Green adventures".

Oulanka's diverse natural settings and attractions are the basis for its pulling power. The area's cultural heritage is also now being highlighted. The recently launched Kulma Project (Metsähallitus 2010a) aims to make local cultural heritage more of an asset for tourism by surveying archaeological sites within the national park, restoring structures including hay barns in old meadows, and collaborating with local firms who can incorporate cultural attractions into their offerings.

## 5.3 Publicity and Marketing

Publicity work is an integral part of a national park's activities, necessary to promote nature conservation, customer services, nature-based tourism and the recreational use of natural areas, and to campaign within society towards these goals. Oulanka's budget for publicity work is small in relation to the park's great popularity. Funds allocated for Metsähallitus's publicity and marketing work is used in marketing events, to meet advertising costs, to arrange our own events, and to increase visibility in materials produced by tourism associations and by Metsähallitus, and more widely.

Metsähallitus also conducts publicity work in collaboration with various partners (Table 5), including joint publicity work with business partners, joint marketing at the regional level with tourism associations, the exchange and distribution of materials, the production of material content for partners, and the granting of permission to use park logos in partners' materials.

**Table 5.** Oulanka National Park's publicity channels.

<b>Metsähallitus's own publicity work</b>	<b>Partners' publicity channels</b>
Customer services in visitor centres <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- films</li> <li>- exhibitions</li> <li>- guidance</li> </ul>	Trade fairs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Outdoor activities trade fairs</li> <li>- Tourism trade fairs</li> <li>- Fairs featuring outdoor activities in Northern Finland</li> </ul>
Materials featuring destinations and routes; other publications	Visibility in regional tourism contexts
Luontoon.fi/Outdoors.fi website <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- featured destinations</li> <li>- services</li> <li>- business partners</li> </ul>	Visibility in the materials of tourism associations and service providers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- materials featuring areas</li> <li>- regional tourism magazines</li> <li>- websites and internet services</li> </ul>
Social media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Facebook</li> <li>- YouTube</li> <li>- Blogs written by park staff</li> </ul>	Events <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Spring event</li> <li>- Haymaking</li> <li>- Oulanka Canoeing for Ladies</li> <li>- Wild Flowers Day and National Parks Day</li> <li>- Hautajärvi Day</li> </ul>
Oulanka bulletins National Parks bulletin	Visibility in the media in Finland and abroad <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- newspapers</li> <li>- magazines</li> <li>- TV and radio</li> </ul>
Signs and maps erected in the park	Patikkapaikka electronic info-point <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- features local natural attractions and services</li> </ul>

The 2009 visitor survey (Ahola & Kivistö 2010a) revealed that more than half of the park's visitors learnt about Oulanka from their friends or relatives. Brochures and guidebooks were the next most frequent source of information. Information was obtained from Metsähallitus's websites ([www.metsa.fi](http://www.metsa.fi) and [www.outdoors.fi](http://www.outdoors.fi)) by 35% of the survey respondents, while a third of respondents used other websites. A third of those surveyed had visited the national park previously.

Customer survey respondents had obtained information on the Oulanka Visitor Centre from varied sources (Kallunki 2010). Their most important single source was the "bush telegraph", with more than a third of respondents getting information from friends and relatives. Brochures and guidebooks were the next most important source, followed by Metsähallitus's websites. A third of respondents were already familiar with the centre.

Local business partners largely find information on the park on the Luontoon.fi website, which is seen as the most useful source of information produced by Metsähallitus (Ahola & Kivistö 2010b). The businesses also know and appreciate the usefulness of the National Parks Bulletin.

## 5.4 Oulanka's Role in Regional Tourism

Tourism in the Ruka-Kuusamo and Salla regions can be said to have arisen partly because of Oulanka National Park, and partly in spite of the park. Ruka is a renowned winter sports resort, and in recent years Salla's reputation as an excellent centre for skiing has also grown greatly. The regional tourism industry is aiming to develop year-round tourism, and also attract more visitors during the snow-free seasons.

The strategy for the internationalisation of tourism in Kuusamo Lapland (Naturpolis 2011b) includes a regional tourism SWOT analysis (Table 6). Identified strengths include the region's national parks, nature and hiking areas, but in future the role of the national parks and Metsähallitus Natural Heritage Services must be strengthened by developing client-group-targeted thematic concepts. Identified opportunities concern the region's national parks, cross-border cooperation, and the development of products for summer tourism.

**Table 6.** SWOT analysis for the Kuusamo Lapland tourism region.

<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>WEAKNESSES</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 3 airlines fly to Kuusamo</li> <li>○ well developed nature-related services, infrastructure and ski-resorts</li> <li>○ national parks, nature, hiking areas</li> <li>○ wide range of accommodation available</li> <li>○ snow guaranteed</li> <li>○ no mass tourism – plenty of breathing space</li> <li>○ experienced and competent local businesses, good spirit of cooperation</li> <li>○ reliable provision of services</li> <li>○ good expertise on domestic market</li> <li>○ knowledge of Russian market</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ poorish results from charters</li> <li>○ internet marketing poorly updated</li> <li>○ online sales limited</li> <li>○ still unknown in many markets</li> <li>○ shortage of sales personnel and knowhow</li> <li>○ poor language skills and cross-cultural awareness</li> <li>○ off season products, summer products</li> <li>○ service mentality</li> </ul>
<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>THREATS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ common airport, other airports</li> <li>○ new seasons and products for present clients</li> <li>○ summer products, summer charters</li> <li>○ national parks</li> <li>○ events including sports events and conferences</li> <li>○ local food and culture</li> <li>○ new travel providers</li> <li>○ cross-border cooperation</li> <li>○ Lapland, the Arctic Circle, Russian border, Russian Karelia</li> <li>○ new web dimensions, social media, new technologies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ economic viability of flights</li> <li>○ collapse of cooperation</li> <li>○ loss of authenticity and local feel to services</li> <li>○ natural disasters</li> <li>○ loss of expertise on VIP services</li> <li>○ rising fuel prices</li> <li>○ stronger euro</li> <li>○ availability of skilled staff</li> <li>○ imbalance in accommodation capacity</li> </ul>

### 5.4.1 Numbers of Tourists

The numbers of tourists visiting the Kuusamo Lapland region have generally been on the increase (Table 7). A survey conducted by Kajaani University of Applied Sciences (2010) showed that the numbers of registered overnights rose by 38.2% between 1999 (534,351 overnights) and 2009 (738,526 overnights). The numbers of overnights by Finnish tourists increased by 22.5% in this period, while the numbers of overnight stays by foreign tourists rose by an impressive 184.8% (from 51,610 in 1999 to 146,968 in 2009). Future growth is also being sought internationally, though domestic tourism will still form the basis for tourism in the region.

**Table 7.** Overnights in Kuusamo Lapland (Kainuun ammattikorkeakoulu 2010; Naturpolis 2011b).

Overnights	2004	2007	2010	2013 (forecasts)
by foreign tourists, total	97 471	158 000	126 000	177 000
summer		39 000	28 500	48 000
winter		119 000	97 500	129 000
<b>Foreign and Finnish tourists</b>	<b>543 263</b>	<b>706 157</b>		

Kuusamo's share of all registered overnights in the Kuusamo Lapland region was highest in 2007 at 56%. When adding on figures for overnights in the municipality of Salla the share of overnights in the vicinity of Oulanka add up to 67%.

The latest figures on the regional impacts of tourism in terms of income and employment cover the whole of North East Finland (Kuusamo, Salla, Posio and Taivalkoski) and date back to 2003 (Juntheikki & Korhonen 2005). The region's total direct income from tourism (including VAT) then amounted to 104.5 million euros, and employment impacts were estimated at 895 person-years. Kuusamo and Salla respectively accounted for approximately 75% and 10% of these figures for all of NE Finland.

Kuusamo's direct income from tourism in 2007 was estimated at 109.3 million euros, with the overall income effect amounting an estimated 116 million euros (Kauppila 2009). The overall employment impacts of tourism added up to an estimated 857 person-years, accounting for 22% of jobs in the private sector and 19% of total turnover. In Salla, direct income from tourism in was estimated to have been some 8 million euros in 2005, and forecast to reach approximately 12 million euros by 2010 (Sallan kunta 2008).

### 5.4.2 Impacts of the National Park on the Local Economy

Oulanka National Park's economic significance to the surrounding region has only recently been consistently assessed. Methodology devised by Metsähallitus and the Finnish Forest Research Institute (Metla) is today used in annual evaluations of the local economic impacts of all of Finland's national parks and hiking areas (as described in Metsähallitus & Metsäntutkimuslaitos 2009). In 2010 the total income impact of the spending of visitors to Oulanka National Park was estimated at 15 million euros, while total employment impacts amounted to an estimated 194 person-years (Metsähallitus 2010b and Table 8). These figures are based on the cash flows generated by the spending of visitors to the national park in the local area and the numbers of jobs such spending supports. These figures have been calculated using information from visitor surveys conducted in 2009 combined with figures for visitor numbers from 2010. These evaluations of income and employment impacts also consider whether the national park is the most important destination during a visit, or just one of several destinations (Table 9).

**Table 8.** Spending of visitors to Oulanka National Park and impacts generated in the local economy, 2010 (figures based on visitor numbers for 2010 and 357 responses to questions on spending in a visitor survey run in 2009).

Spending segment	Average total spending (incl. VAT)	Impact on income (€, excl. VAT)	Share of income impacts (%)	Employment impact (person-years)
Purchases in petrol stations <sup>1</sup>	19.15	201 775	2	4
Local transportation <sup>2</sup>	3.95	612 879	7	6
Food etc from local stores	23.84	1 202 926	13	25
Cafes and restaurants	13.66	1 799 406	19	30
Accommodation	28.95	4 469 951	48	74
Organised activities <sup>3</sup>	3.52	546 827	6	6
Other spending <sup>4</sup>	4.00	526 152	6	8
<b>Total direct impacts of spending</b>		<b>9 386 916</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>153</b>
Indirect impacts		5 593 986		40
<b>Total impacts</b>		<b>14 980 902</b>		<b>194</b>

1 Fuel and other purchases made at petrol stations

2 Local bus and taxi fares etc.

3 Guided excursions, entry to exhibitions and events etc.

4 Permits for fishing, hunting, snowmobile use; equipment hire etc.

**Table 9.** Income and employment impacts broken down according to the importance of Oulanka as a destination to visitors, 2010 (figures based on visitor numbers for 2010 and responses to questions on spending in a visitor survey run in 2009).

Spending segment	Oulanka the most important destination (174 visitor responses)		Oulanka one of many destinations or a previously unplanned destination (183 visitor responses)	
	Income impact (€, excl. VAT)	Employment impact (person-years)	Income impact (€, excl. VAT)	Employment impact (person-years)
Purchases in petrol stations <sup>1</sup>	97 903	2.1	103 871	2.2
Local transportation <sup>2</sup>	480 288	4.9	132 591	1.3
Food etc from local stores	514 185	10.8	688 741	14.6
Cafes and restaurants	753 998	12.4	1 045 408	17.3
Accommodation	2 040 301	33.7	2 456 622	43.5
Organised activities <sup>3</sup>	197 567	2.0	349 260	3.6
Other spending <sup>4</sup>	225 037	3.5	301 114	4.7
<b>Total direct impacts of spending</b>	<b>4 309 280</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>5 077 635</b>	<b>84</b>
Indirect impacts	2 567 579	19	3 026 407	22
<b>Total impacts<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>6 876 859</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>8 104 043</b>	<b>106</b>

1 Fuel and other purchases made at petrol stations

2 Local bus and taxi fares etc.

3 Guided excursions, entry to exhibitions and events etc.

4 Permits for fishing, hunting, snowmobile use; equipment hire etc.

5 When impacts are evaluated by client-segment, total impacts vary compared to the unsegmented data.

## 5.5 Conclusions on the Present State of the Park in Relation to Demand Factors

Oulanka's attractions have been described by a visitor to the park's Facebook site as follows: *"Whenever I'm passing the area I just have to stop and listen to the Kiutaköngäs Falls, climb up the cliffs of Oulanka Canyon, and admire the views of Konttainen. I hope that one day I'll hike the whole way between Hautajärvi and Ruka. And paddle from Kiutaköngäs to the Jäkälämutka meanders. I've done many stretches of these routes, most recently last August. The camping areas and cabins along the way are excellent – I hope they'll be kept up, and the same goes for the visitor centres at Hautajärvi and Kiutaköngäs!"*

This comment shows that Oulanka is not dependent on a single attraction, but has many different sights and experiences to offer. Natural features, wildlife, cultural heritage, various activities and the park's diverse landscapes all make up a wide-ranging package of attractions with great pulling power. Many of these features are already being utilised, but some of them are still to some extent taken for granted.

Tourism in the Kuusamo Lapland region is still largely based on winter sports, and the area's rapidly increasing accommodation capacity could benefit from greater use at other times of the year. It is particularly vital to develop activities to attract tourists during the snow-free seasons. The regional tourism strategy for Kuusamo Lapland states that the basis for summer tourism consists of national parks, hiking routes and the area's rivers and lakes. In product development contexts summer products and activities are to be built up under the theme "Nature & Active".

Surveys indicate that visitors' spending is increasing, particularly when it comes to enjoying organised activities (Kajaanin ammattikorkeakoulu 2010). As urbanisation progresses, people's attitudes to nature are changing, and visitors are less prepared to explore natural areas on their own. Tourists in general, and particularly foreign visitors, increasingly require different kinds of guidance when seeking experiences. This trend will surely increase the demand for tourism services and guided activities in natural settings in the future.

# 6 The Sustainability of Tourism

The main idea behind sustainable nature-based tourism is to provide people with positive experiences without endangering ecological and cultural values. Metsähallitus has devised a set of principles for sustainable nature tourism that account for the ecological, socio-cultural and economic aspects of sustainability:

- 1. Natural values are preserved and all activities promote nature conservation.**
- 2. The environment is subjected to as little pressure as possible.**
- 3. Local traditions and cultures are respected.**
- 4. Visitors increase their understanding and appreciation of nature and cultures.**
- 5. Improved recreational facilities are provided for visitors.**
- 6. Visitors are encouraged to enjoy both mental and physical recreation.**
- 7. Local economies and employment are promoted.**
- 8. Publicity materials are produced responsibly and carefully.**
- 9. Activities are planned and organised co-operatively.**

Ecological sustainability means ensuring that human activities do not reduce biodiversity or the capacity of ecosystems, and that the use of national parks for recreation and nature-based tourism does not reduce their natural values. Socio-cultural and economic sustainability concerns the impacts of national parks and nature-based tourism on local economies and the lives and livelihoods of local people. Where tourism is planned well, it can bring considerable economic benefits, while also enabling other livelihoods and traditional lifestyles to continue thriving.

Developing sustainable nature-based tourism involves cooperation between Metsähallitus, tourism service providers and local stakeholders. Metsähallitus's principles for sustainable nature tourism have also been used as a basis for the monitoring and assessment of sustainability as described later in this section.

## 6.1. Principles for Sustainable Tourism

Metsähallitus's nine principles for sustainable nature tourism form the cornerstone for collaboration with Metsähallitus's business partners and related development work. The same principles are also applied to guide the use of protected areas by local residents, tourists, local municipalities and other organisations. More detailed objectives have also been defined for each of these principles to guide Metsähallitus's work (see Appendix 2).

Oulanka National Park's business partners are committed to operate in accordance with these principles for sustainable nature tourism. Responses to a survey of these businesses (Ahola & Kivistö 2010b) suggested that local actors have in general successfully observed the principles, which they rated positively as being both favourable and practically realizable.

The principles for sustainable nature tourism have been applied in the shaping of methodology used to monitor and assess various aspects of sustainability in Oulanka National Park, as described below.

## 6.2 Assessment of the Sustainability of Tourism

Sustainability is continuously monitored at Oulanka National Park. One specific goal of an earlier sustainable tourism development strategy updated in 2004 (Metsähallitus 2004) was to adopt new methodology for evaluating the environmental impacts of nature-based tourism, known as *Limits of Acceptable Change* (LAC). This method, based on indicators derived from the principles for sustainable nature tourism, compares present and target values with specified limit values. Measurements have been taken for a total of 33 indicators related to the implementation of the nine principles (Metsähallitus 2004). It is not possible to compile figures for all of the indicators on an annual basis, since for instance the visitor surveys used to calculate some of the indicators are only conducted every five years, and the use of paths is only monitored at three-year intervals. In addition to the indicator data, the park's biotopes, species and feedback from visitors are also continuously monitored, enabling prompt reaction whenever the need arises.

Evaluations of the sustainability of different activities in the park have been facilitated by research cooperation with Oulu University's Oulanka research station. Indicators used within Oulanka National Park during the period 2005–2009 have been analysed both internally and externally (Siikamäki & Kangas 2009), enabling the indicators to be further enhanced. Overlapping and redundant indicators have subsequently been omitted, and the total number of indicators used today has decreased to 22 (Appendix 3).

Oulanka is a popular destination for hikers, and the large numbers of visitors inevitably leave traces behind in the park's natural settings. Many occurrences of valuable species and biotopes are located in the immediate vicinity of some of Oulanka's well-used trails. The rocky habitats around Kiutaköngäs Falls are both ecologically valuable and highly popular with visitors. Visitors are also generally free to explore the park away from trails, though visitors' movements are restricted in the most ecologically sensitive areas containing vulnerable species. The disturbance caused by visitors can be prevented and reduced, however, by channeling activities into certain areas, by shifting routes away from sensitive sites, and by making visitors aware of such problems.

In the context of Oulanka's routes and facilities the emphasis is on maintaining their high quality rather than on expansion. The total surface area of camping sites and paths amounts to about 0.6% of the total area of Oulanka National Park and Valtavaara Nature Reserve. If trails are considered as having an impact zone extending for 100 metres, 9.1% of the total area of the two reserves falls within such zones (Kangas et al. 2007). The hiking and nature-based tourism zone defined in Oulanka's management plan covers approximately 15% of the national park (Metsähallitus 2011). New routings for existing trails are planned to ensure they do not endanger natural values. Routes are chosen to lead visitors through areas that are naturally resistant; erosion is monitored along routes; trails can be made more durable; and routes may also be altered where necessary to prevent damage and disturbance. The durability and capacity of trails can be boosted by providing steps and duck-boards or surfacing them with gravel.

Monitoring conducted during the years 2005–2009 indicates that visitors have not endangered the park's natural values. The zoning of the park and measures to channel visitors have helped to preserve the park's natural state and wildness in spite of the growing numbers of visitors. Erosion around camping sites and picnic areas has declined, but the amounts of litter have increased. The amounts of litter along the main trails have also risen to some extent, and fewer unplanned trails created by visitors are evident. Trails have become narrower, but they are slightly more deeply eroded, though the numbers of stones and tree roots exposed along trails have declined. Erosion and litter have not disturbed the park's visitors, however (Ahola & Kivistö 2010a).

A survey of local residents' views on nature conservation and tourism published in 2005 indicated that attitudes are mainly positive (Törn et al. 2005). Negatively perceived factors mentioned in

relation to conservation included the extension of protective measures into privately owned land, worsening conditions for commercial farming and forestry, and restrictions on hunting and fishing. The most widely perceived problems in relation to nature-based tourism were erosion and the pollution of rivers and lakes.

Tourism is a significant source of livelihood in areas near Oulanka National Park, and its impacts on the local economy are studied regularly. Metsähallitus also conducts its own assessments of the impacts of national parks on local economies annually (see Section 5.4.2).

The opinions of visitors to Oulanka National Park are compiled through continuous feedback and surveys of visitors to customer service points and the park itself. These surveys are based on Metsähallitus's national customer monitoring strategy, and conducted at five year intervals. Tourists' satisfaction levels with the whole tourism region are measured through feedback obtained from different sources and surveys. In the Ruka-Kuusamo area, for example, customer satisfaction levels are measured seasonally. A survey conducted in summer 2009 showed that the national park was a significant factor in the choice of destination, and that almost half of the survey's 615 respondents had also visited the national park (Ruka-Kuusamo matkailuyhdistys 2009).

# 7 The Desired State of Tourism

## 7.1 Oulanka National Park and Nearby Areas

The Oulanka Cooperation Group has set the following goals for the future state of the national park on the basis of objectives defined in the sustainable tourism development strategy updated in 2004:

**Unique natural settings and high-quality services will make Oulanka National Park into an asset for nature-based tourism in Northeastern Finland and the region's most important attraction at national and international level.**

**Oulanka National Park's services will be produced together with local stakeholders by consistently applying best practices.**

**Oulanka National Park will provide visitors with genuine experiences of nature and well-being while respecting the natural environment.**

To reach these goals Metsähallitus and the park's stakeholders must realise many kinds of actions. The desired state of nature-based tourism can be summarised as a harmony between the natural environment and the services based on its attractions: experiences and well-being must be jointly produced through high-quality services that safeguard natural values. To make these objectives more concrete, services, the means to provide them, and the necessary publicity measures have been set out below under five themes, in Tables 10–14. These tables list objectives defined for the medium term (5–10 years), as well as means to work towards these targets in the shorter term (1–5 years). The five themes are:

- Publicity
- Routes and facilities
- The roles of a visitor centre
- Cooperation and partnerships
- Internationalisation

**Table 10.** Objectives for publicity and means to reach them.

<b>THEME: PUBLICITY</b>	
<b>Objectives and realisation</b>	<b>Means</b>
<p><b>Oulanka's recognised attractions and visitors' needs and desires will be utilised in the park's publicity.</b> Publicity will also cover natural and cultural values.</p>	<p>Publicity will aim to attract specific client groups, including international clients. Natural and cultural values will feature prominently both in the media and in guidance provided in the park.</p>
<p><b>Information on the park and its facilities will be available through modern media channels.</b> The emphasis will be shifted from printed materials to electronic media. New applications will be actively sought and utilised unreservedly. Basic information on the park will continue to be freely available, but products such as route-specific cards and maps could be sold.</p>	<p>The use of web-cameras and other moving images will be increased. Mobile applications will be utilised. In addition to the general brochure on the park, high-quality booklets on specific routes and attractions will be available in various languages for downloading and printing in PDF format from the Outdoors.fi website. The electronic info point Hiking Site will be enhanced.</p>
<p><b>Visitors will be aware of litter-free hiking.</b> All visitors will be aware of the principles of litter-free hiking and able to act accordingly. No litter or wastes will be left at camping sites.</p>	<p>Increased publicity about what litter-free hiking involves, with the key message of "a park free of litter". Signs will be provided at the start of routes and in picnic sites, with more detailed advice at popular sites.</p>
<p><b>Publicity will be effectively channelled through partners' communications based on the needs of both sides.</b> Such publicity must effectively attract attention among stakeholder groups. Most information about national parks is provided by partners such as tourism associations and local businesses. The Outdoors.fi website will also serve businesses and their clients.</p>	<p>Publicity materials (texts, images and logos) will also be available for partners to use. Local businesses and their activities will be highlighted more clearly on the Outdoors.fi website. National parks will be prominently featured in regional tourism presentations at trade fairs and in partners' communications and event marketing. Events will also be arranged jointly with partners.</p>
<p><b>Awareness of Natural Heritage Services and its work will increase.</b> Natural Heritage Services will also publicise national parks and its work managing them in materials bearing its own signature.</p>	<p>Metsähallitus's work will be highlighted to help to safeguard its role. Natural values and the positive impacts of protected areas on local economies will particularly be spotlighted. The production of staff blogs for the Luontoon.fi website will continue.</p>
<p><b>Collaboration with various media will be enhanced.</b> We will actively maintain contacts with various media, especially at the local level. We will embrace social media as a significant modern communication channel.</p>	<p>In addition to conventional press bulletins we will offer topics to the media, especially at local level, including more guest columns. Social media will be utilised in line with their contemporary significance.</p>
<p><b>"Wilderness" will be a key theme in international publicity.</b> International publicity will be harmonised with PAN Parks' publicity together with the PAN Parks Foundation.</p>	<p>Oulanka(–Paanajärvi) will find new applications for PAN Parks' "Protecting European Wilderness" slogan in publicity work and branding.</p>

**Table 11.** Objectives for routes and facilities and means to reach them.

<b>THEME: ROUTES AND FACILITIES</b>	
<b>Objectives and realisation</b>	<b>Means</b>
<p><b>All of Oulanka's routes will be made into products.</b> Each route is coherent in itself as well as forming part of an integrated set of attractions. The targeting of client groups and clientele segmentation will be promoted as part of the planning of routes and services. The park's route network will include both "fully equipped trails" that can be walked by visitors wearing high heels, as well as wilder trails requiring less maintenance.</p>	<p>An overall assessment of the park's routes will be conducted, followed by the necessary action plans for their improvement, alteration or discontinuation. In the future the most popular trails will be prioritised in maintenance, leaving other routes as "wilderness trails". Routes will be classified and publicised so as to inform users how demanding and well-maintained they are.</p>
<p><b>We will be aware of the visitor groups using the park, and where, when and how they use the park.</b> We will have valid information about the different categories of visitor, and be able to attract new visitor groups to the park. Visitor monitoring will provide information on the flows of visitors through the park. Tallying devices will provide reliable data on the numbers of visitors in the park and on its routes, also for the purposes of publicity and reporting. The park's client surveying strategy will be updated.</p>	<p>Regional clientele segmentation will be conducted on the basis of national studies and surveys of the park's visitors and clients. New visitor groups will be targeted through publicity work and participation in new forms of cooperation. The use of surveying devices will be enhanced, with additional devices obtained or their locations changed as necessary. The devices used in the park can be moved to new locations annually.</p>
<p><b>Wheelchair-users will also be able to visit the national park.</b> Oulanka National Park will have at least one easily accessible route suitable for visitors using wheelchairs or pushchairs, and leading to a viewpoint overlooking a scenic river valley.</p>	<p>Possible routes will be surveyed together with an organisation with expertise on disabled access. If a suitable route is found, a project will be set up to create a route.</p>
<p><b>Canoeing on the River Oulankajoki will grow further in popularity.</b> Services for canoeists will be enhanced, including opportunities to combine canoeing and hiking. Landing sites will be improved. Metsähallitus will contribute actively to canoeing safety issues.</p>	<p>A route from Jäkälämutka to the Karhunkierros Trail will be planned and established. The road to the riverbank below Kiutaköngäs will be improved, and the car park expanded. The former ranger's hut at Aitaniitty will be available for canoeists to book. The marketing of canoeing will continue. Spring canoeing safety checks will be run in collaboration with canoeing service providers, tourism associations and the safety authorities.</p>
<p><b>Routes will be designed with respect to natural and cultural values and sustainability considerations.</b> Routes will not run through areas sensitive to erosion or threaten significant natural values. Sensibly planned routes will reduce the need for maintenance and surfacing. Routes should take visitors to cultural sites such as riverside meadows and old barns.</p>	<p>Routes will be planned to prevent erosion, and erosion levels will be monitored. Existing routes can also be rerouted as necessary. The Karhunkierros Trail will be rerouted to pass old hay barns. Any changes to routes, including surfacing, will be duly publicised.</p>
<p><b>Routes and structures will be safe for visitors.</b> Maintenance work in the national park will function well, and routes will all be usable. Information will be available on related risks and threats, with preventive measures duly taken.</p>	<p>Structures will be repaired and renewed pro-actively, ensuring that no structures in the park are in poor condition. Routes will be well signposted. A risk analysis will be conducted on recreational activities.</p>
<p><b>Suitable signs and guidance will be provided in the field.</b> Signs etc in the field will be durable, informative and functional all year round, also considering the needs of winter visitors and international visitors.</p>	<p>Signs etc will be renewed using durable materials e.g. metal. Reflectors designed to remain visible will be provided along trails and at resting sites used during the winter. All signs will be in at least Finnish and English.</p>
<p><b>Visitors will be spread more evenly, in seasonal and spatial terms.</b> Increasing visitor numbers and new activities must not endanger sustainability. Oulanka's routes will not become crowded, thanks to measures including one-way systems. Increases in visitor numbers should be spread evenly across different routes inside and outside the park.</p>	<p>Measure to channel visitors function well. Visitors will also be encouraged to use routes in neighbouring destinations by highlighting them in marketing, on the Hiking Website and also increasingly through other electronic marketing channels.</p>
<p><b>The park will be increasingly visited during the winter.</b> Visitors will discover Oulanka's natural attractions also in the winter, while remaining aware of the requirements and risks related to outdoor activities during the winter.</p>	<p>The visitor centre will also serve as a gateway to nature during the winter. Winter activities will be developed together with partners. Inexperienced winter visitors will be channelled onto shorter and well-signposted routes. Signs suitable for dark conditions will be developed.</p>
<p><b>The park's renovated camping site will serve visitors all year round.</b> The camping site will be improved to provide higher standard accommodation for longer seasons or even all year round, to support the increasing winter use of the park.</p>	<p>The camping site will be fully refitted in line with a new service concept. Project funding will be required for the renovation of the site's cabins to make the suitable for year-round use.</p>

**Table 12.** Objectives for visitor centres and means to reach them.

<b>THEME: THE ROLE OF A VISITOR CENTRE</b>	
<b>Objectives and realisation</b>	<b>Means</b>
<p><b>Customer service points will serve all visitors.</b> Customer service points are open to everyone and operate in line with modern service concepts.</p>	<p>To continue to serve old and new visitors Oulanka Visitor Centre needs a completely renewed exhibition and new audio-visual materials featuring the area (incl. Paanajärvi). Oulanka's customer service points will also serve as a window featuring the nearby Paanajärvi National Park in Russia.</p>
<p><b>Visitor centres will be used for many local activities.</b> The centre at Hautajärvi will particularly serve as a focal point for the village and a place for local service providers, associations and residents to meet and work together.</p>	<p>Premises and facilities will be offered to local users more readily, and the park will participate in events in local villages.</p>
<p><b>Visitor centres will organise popular events on themes related to nature together with their partners all year round.</b> To increase local flavour events can be linked to other local events, such as Käylä's log-floating competitions, and events in other localities such as the Karhuntasu service point. Collaboration with partners is vital in planning new events.</p>	<p>No matter who holds responsibility for organising events, they should be seen as national park events and have the full backing of the park. Existing events will be continued and enhanced. New events will be planned according to the needs of Metsähallitus and other interested parties.</p>
<p><b>The activities of visitor centres will not be limited to within their walls.</b> Visitor centres' activities will also be organised outside Oulanka and in areas beyond neighbouring villages.</p>	<p>The scope of such activities outside visitor centres will be extended as resources allow. Events organised for local residents can also be organised in the town of Kuusamo (e.g. at Karhuntassu).</p>
<p><b>Foreign visitors will enjoy Oulanka's attractions and account for a greater share of the park's visitors.</b> Services provided by visitor centres and in relation to routes will be comprehensively available at least in English, and also when possible in other languages, considering the needs of people from different cultures. Visitor surveys, feedback and personal experiences will be monitored by nationality, with services consequently revised as necessary. Oulanka Visitor Centre's exhibits will also serve foreign visitors.</p>	<p>Materials and guidance will be produced in different language versions with clear core messages. When exhibitions are renewed the needs of visitors from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds will be considered. Explanations should be on display at least in English (as well as Finnish), but interpretations in other languages can also be provided in booklets for visitors to borrow, for instance. The language and cross-cultural skills of customer service staff should be maintained.</p>
<p><b>The role of Oulanka National Park and its visitor centres in regional environmental education will be prominent.</b> In spite of the scarce resources available, Oulanka National Park will defend its position in regional environmental education by networking with other actors.</p>	<p>Cooperation agreements will be made, e.g. with the Oivanki youth centre. Wherever feasible the national park will also collaborate with schools and contribute towards materials for school camps etc.</p>

**Table 13.** Objectives for cooperation and partnerships and means to reach them.

<b>THEME: COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS</b>	
<b>Objectives and realisation</b>	<b>Means</b>
<p><b>Metsähallitus is an attractive and valued partner within the tourism sector.</b></p> <p>Collaboration with Metsähallitus Natural Heritage Services will give partners added value. We treat business partners equally while requiring them to be active. The national park and its services will be publicised collaboratively.</p>	<p>Communications directed at partners will be effectively intensified. The benefits of becoming a business partner of the park and a PAN Parks Local Business Partner will particularly be publicised.</p>
<p><b>Oulanka's business partners will learn about the park's natural and cultural values.</b></p> <p>Our business partners' other staff members will also be well aware of the area's values. Training for the certification of Oulanka National Park guides and re-certification processes will be run regularly for business partners.</p>	<p>Training enabling people to become certified Oulanka National Park guides and a recertification process for existing guides will be organised in 2012. In future new guides and business partners will be able to receive such training more frequently than at the previous five-year intervals.</p>
<p><b>Visitor centres will organise popular events on themes related to nature together with their partners all year round.</b></p> <p>The active involvement of partners is vital in planning new events. Voluntary work contributions will also be increasingly sought with the help of organisations and businesses.</p>	<p>Existing events will be continued and enhanced. New events will be planned according to the needs of Metsähallitus and other interested parties.</p>
<p><b>Services provided by local businesses will form an integral element of the national park's services.</b></p> <p>Locally operating businesses will provide visitors with high-quality experiences in accordance with the principles of sustainable nature tourism.</p>	<p>Business partners will utilise the national park's logo in connection with the services they provide in the park. The park's services will be developed together with local actors and through collaborative product design.</p>
<p><b>The national park's services and products will be safe and of high quality.</b></p> <p>The activities provided within the park will all fully comply with legal requirements on product safety and the related documentation. Safety issues are of the utmost concern to everyone, and quality management will also form part of every business's operations.</p>	<p>Businesses working in the national park are fully aware of their responsibilities concerning safety as service providers. Product safety and quality will be promoted through collaboration with businesses and tourism associations, for instance by arranging spring canoeing safety checks together with service providers, tourism associations and the rescue services.</p>
<p><b>Awareness of the beneficial health impacts of outdoor activities will be increased.</b></p> <p>More research data will be compiled on the health impacts of protected areas and outdoor recreational activities. Metsähallitus will cooperate on this process with organisations working with health issues.</p>	<p>Collaboration (e.g. with the Oulanka research station) will be intensified to promote studies examining the health impacts of outdoor recreation in natural settings. Research findings will be utilised in publicity work and the development of services. Natural Heritage Services and well-being service providers will jointly design, create and market such services.</p>
<p><b>Trout stocks in the Koutajoki river basin will be protected and managed collaboratively and coherently.</b></p> <p>Oulanka's trout population will thrive to the extent that fishing can be permissible and sustainable. Fishing throughout the river basin will be managed coherently and sustainably through collaboration between all relevant stakeholders.</p>	<p>The fishing regulations to be applied in the river basin will be coherent and clear to fishers, while above all ensuring that fish populations are conserved at sustainable levels.</p>

**Table 14.** Objectives for internationalisation and means to reach them.

<b>THEME: INTERNATIONALISATION</b>	
<b>Objectives and realisation</b>	<b>Means</b>
<b>Oulanka–Paanajärvi will be the most attractive wilderness destination in Europe.</b> The use of the park for tourism will be developed comprehensively, through initiatives including the development of joint tourism products.	Oulanka–Paanajärvi will become a certified pair of twin parks within the PAN Parks network in 2012. A joint nature tourism strategy will be created for the two parks. Joint tourism products will be developed in collaboration with business partners. Nature-based tourism services and cultural heritage attractions will be enhanced, for instance through the reconstruction of the farmstead at Arola.
<b>Collaboration between the twin parks of Oulanka and Paanajärvi will set a prime example for such cross-border cooperation.</b> In accordance with the vision for Oulanka–Paanajärvi, the management plans for the two national parks will be broadly similar. The parks' staff will also adopt the Oulanka–Paanajärvi vision through their shared experiences.	The realisation of this vision for Oulanka–Paanajärvi by 2015 will be monitored and facilitated. Cooperation between staff from the two parks will be intensified. The twin parks will participate actively in EUROPARC's Transboundary Parks and Green Belt cooperation networks.
<b>The principles of the PAN Parks – Local Business Partner and Tourism models will be jointly applied.</b> The cooperation group and PAN Parks Local Business Partnerships will be duly coordinated.	The role of PAN Parks Local Business Partnerships will be clarified (Appendix 4). In connection with new certifications the cooperation group will define the issues that must be verified and set guidelines for a Tourism Model.
<b>Oulanka National Park will play an active role and be prominently visible in international forums.</b> The park will participate in international conservation activities and the development of nature-based tourism, and its expertise will be internationally appreciated.	Good practices will be publicised, and Oulanka will participate in international activities both in neighbouring regions and around the world, including wide-ranging involvement in international cooperation on research examining the management of protected areas.

## 7.2 The Kuusamo Lapland Region

The vision set out in the updated strategy for the Kuusamo Lapland tourism region (Naturpolis 2011b), defined through collaboration initiated in 2003, aims to make the region into:

**an internationally popular destination for outdoor holidays.**

The aim is to promote year-round tourism, but with emphasis on snow and winter activities. Strategic goals defined for the present strategy period (2011–2013) include:

- Marketing strength – cooperation under the Lapland theme
- Intensified sales capacity – spread of online sales
- Transport links as a vital lifeline – ensuring the continuation of incoming flights
- Attractiveness and competitiveness – product concepts
- Year-round attractions – development of saleable summer season products
- Increasing recognition and interest in the region – investments in media and press work
- Strengthening of internal cooperation within Kuusamo Lapland.

One of the previous strategy's focus areas, the pooling of resources, is now well established in the region, as is the idea of focusing on a few selected markets. Quality assurance work has been initiated and will continue. The main target markets include Russia, Ukraine, the Benelux countries, Germany and Britain. A fifth target area, Southern Europe, includes Italy, Spain and France.

Measurable indicators for the defined objectives include the numbers of overnights, flight connections and significant tour operators. One target has been to increase the figure for overnight stays by foreign tourists by 12% every year. After a decline commencing in 2008, the goal is now to bring this figure up to just over its 2007-level by 2013.

## 8 Action Plan

The need to develop nature-based tourism at Oulanka National Park has been examined together with stakeholders throughout strategic planning processes, including the drafting of the park's management plan. The views of tourism service providers have been compiled through surveys and annual feedback. Views and proposals submitted through other channels by other actors working in regional tourism have also been considered during the drafting of this action plan. Strategic planning procedures have been conducted in line with Metsähallitus's national guidelines.

The updated strategy for the Kuusamo Lapland tourism region has been produced jointly by various actors within the region's tourism sector. Local businesses have participated in the drafting of the strategy through various channels, including a project planning seminar.

### 8.1 Actions to Develop Oulanka National Park

The table of actions presented within this strategy will be updated as necessary according to changes in the operating environment or as new information becomes available. The table will also be examined as part of annual planning procedures with a focus on actions timed for the following year. The Oulanka Cooperation Group will also review the actions annually. Development actions scheduled for the national park during the forthcoming five-year period are set out below in Table 15.

Progress on development work and investments is largely dependent on external funding. It is crucial to find financing for additional development measures, since the funds provided from the national budget by the Ministry of the Environment for the management of protected areas are generally only sufficient to safeguard the running of basic activities. Other sources of funding that have so far been utilised include job creation programmes financed by the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), and in the context of cross-border twin parks collaboration with Paanajärvi the EU's Interreg IV C programmes and the new Karelia European Neighbourhood and Partnership (ENPI) programme.

**Table 15:** Actions to develop Oulanka National Park 2011–2015.

<b>Actions to develop Oulanka National Park year by year</b>	
<b>2011</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning and implementation of visitor channeling at Kiutaköngäs</li> <li>• Relocation of gateway to Karhunkierros Trail at Ruka, and related signposting</li> <li>• Planning of redevelopment of Oulanka camping area</li> <li>• Revision of Oulanka National Park's maintenance plan</li> <li>• Annual renovation work on facilities</li> <li>• Comprehensive assessment of individual routes and target groups at Oulanka</li> <li>• Surveys of trail conditions as part of field monitoring of sustainability</li> <li>• Updating of Oulanka National Park's regulations</li> <li>• Preparation of joint management plan for Oulanka–Paanajärvi</li> <li>• Drafting of management plan for Valtavaara–Pyhävaara to commence</li> <li>• Visitor survey at Valtavaara–Pyhävaara</li> <li>• Completion of nature tourism strategy for Oulanka–Paanajärvi</li> <li>• Campaign to prevent litter</li> <li>• Assessment and clarification of the roles of visitor centres</li> <li>• Production of product cards and leaflets featuring day-visit routes (first phase)</li> <li>• National parks bulletin published</li> <li>• Signs erected at managed meadow sites</li> <li>• Revamping of Luontoon.fi/Outdoors.fi website</li> <li>• Installation of web cameras in the national park</li> <li>• Production of video images for use in social media</li> </ul>
<b>2012</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning of a route suitable for disabled visitors</li> <li>• Comprehensive assessments of routes at Oulanka to continue</li> <li>• Annual renovation work on facilities</li> <li>• Drafting of management plan for Valtavaara–Pyhävaara to be completed</li> <li>• PAN Parks verification for the twin parks Oulanka–Paanajärvi</li> <li>• Training and recertification of official guides for Oulanka National Parks</li> <li>• Production of product cards and leaflets featuring day-visit routes (second phase)</li> <li>• National parks bulletin published</li> <li>• Survey of customers at Hautajärvi Visitor Centre</li> <li>• Risk analysis of recreational use of the park</li> </ul>
<b>2013 or later</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Route alterations along Karhunkierros Trail, including the bridge at Koutajoki</li> <li>• Creation of a route suitable for disabled visitors</li> <li>• Comprehensive renovation of Oulanka camping area</li> <li>• Annual renovation work on facilities</li> <li>• National parks bulletin published</li> <li>• Survey of customers at Oulanka Visitor Centre 2013</li> <li>• Oulanka National Park visitor survey 2014</li> <li>• Survey of business partners of Oulanka National Park 2014</li> <li>• Renewal of maintenance contract for Oulanka National Park 2014</li> <li>• Updating of Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy 2015</li> <li>• Renewal of exhibition and audio visual presentations at Oulanka Visitor Centre</li> <li>• Development of mobile guidance for visitors</li> <li>• Launch of second phase of reconstruction of Arola farmstead, Paanajärvi</li> </ul>

## 8.2 Actions to Develop the Kuusamo Lapland Region

Actions to be taken within the Kuusamo Lapland region during the next strategic period 2011–2013 will focus on enhancing sales and marketing, improving transport connections and spearhead products, increasing recognition of the region, and organising cooperation (Table 16). Many of these measures are closely linked to the simultaneously operating Lapland – North of Finland brand marketing campaign. Product concepts and sales will be developed through a separate project.

**Table 16:** Actions to develop the Kuusamo Lapland region 2011–2013.

<b>1. Enhanced marketing</b>	Preparations in the Kuusamo Lapland region for cooperation related to marketing under the Lapland – North of Finland brand, including new product concepts and more active sales.
	Provision of resources to enable staff to assist Lapland – North of Finland measures, including visits from media and tour organisers at the local level.
<b>2. More active sales</b>	Assessment during 2011 of models for creating a shared online shop up, to be ready by the beginning of 2012. Updating of internet marketing.
	Organisation of training on export activities for businesses.
<b>3. Spearhead products into saleable shape</b>	Development of a suitable summer season product concept (Nature-Active?) together with tour organisers for Dutch, German and Russian markets. Planning and testing during 2011; production to commence in 2012.
	Thematic concept Snow-Active (winter) polished into final shape with regard to target groups and seasons.
	Creation of a practical Product Manual to facilitate sales in main markets.
	Products to go on sale in online shop and through sales companies.
<b>4. Transport</b>	Regular negotiations with airlines on common goals and measures, in collaboration with the “Lapland North of Finland” branding.
	Creation of suitable product pallets together with transportation providers, and access to their online sales channels.
<b>5. Recognition</b>	Annual plan and goals for press work in relation to selected key markets.
	Contributions to annual action plans created within the Lapland North of Finland project.
	Collaboration with the Finnish Tourist Board on press visits.
	Collaboration with the organisers of local sports events (including Nordic freestyle and snowboarding).
<b>6. Permanent organisation of cooperation</b>	Establishment and official registration of a permanent cooperation body (as a company or registered association).
	Appointment of a permanent tourism officer or development manager funded from municipal budgets.

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## **Founding Charter of Oulanka National Park Cooperation Group**

**NAME:** Oulanka National Park Cooperation Group (LPPG)

**PURPOSE:**

1. Counsellor for administration of Oulanka National Park
2. Communication and publicity
3. Local PAN Parks Group

**TASKS:**

- 1.1. Handling of current actions and projects affecting Oulanka
- 1.2. Acting as an advisory group for planning
  
- 2.1 Representation and participation of stakeholder groups
- 2.2. Publicising of Oulanka National Park actions and projects
- 2.3. Gathering and forwarding of feedback on the national park
  
- 3.1. Working out of principles of nature tourism for businesses and stakeholder groups
- 3.2. Verification, recommendation and monitoring of local PAN Parks partners
- 3.3. Recommendation and participation in monitoring of national and international PAN Parks partners

**MEMBERS AND POWERS:**

- Metsähallitus (Oulanka National Park)
- Town of Kuusamo
- Municipality of Salla
- nature conservation NGO
- Residents near Oulanka National Park (Salla)
- Residents near Oulanka National Park (Kuusamo)
- Ruka-Kuusamo tourism association
- Salla tourism association
- Tourism entrepreneurs in Kuusamo
- Tourism entrepreneurs in Salla

The official organisations (Metsähallitus, municipalities, nature conservation, tourism associations, village organisations) choose and empower their representative themselves. Tourism entrepreneur representatives are invited to the Group.

**WORKING METHOD:**

The chairmanship of the Group alternates annually between the Town of Kuusamo and the Municipality of Salla. Metsähallitus acts as the Group's secretary.

The Oulanka Co-operation Group meets twice a year (in January and June), in addition to which meetings can be convened by the chairman as and when the need arises.

The Oulanka Co-operation Group makes assessments of businesses seeking PAN Parks certification and, in the case of a favourable response, writes a support letter for certification. For this, a 4/5ths majority of the Oulanka Co-operation Group's members is required. In the report connected with the verification, Group members can express a difference of opinion.

**FUNDING:**

Official organisations participate in the Oulanka Co-operation Group as a means to safeguard their own interests. They do so at their own expense. The expenses incurred by representatives of tourism enterprises and local residents attending meetings are met by Metsähallitus.

## **Principles of Sustainable Nature Tourism**

In order to develop nature tourism and its requirements, Metsähallitus has compiled principles of sustainable nature tourism for protected and wilderness areas, as well as for destinations within conservation programmes. Sustainable nature tourism is being developed in cooperation with enterprises, local residents, municipalities and other communities working in tourism. The principles of sustainable nature tourism are not a list of what must and must not be done. If anything, they are about our common ambition to reach a target situation that conforms to these general principles.

Sustainable nature tourism is pursued in the protected, wilderness and conservation programme areas, which are managed by Metsähallitus, in such a way that

### **1. Natural heritage is preserved and the activities promote nature conservation**

- Nature is an important reason to travel
- Visitors are told about the area's nature and its protection
- Tourism does not disturb nature, not all areas are suitable for tourism use
- Groups are small, they travel along the trail whenever possible
- Tourism is channelled by the location of the service structure and the instructions provided
- The environment is built into in an adaptable way, scenic areas are preserved without added constructions
- The wear on the natural environment and other environmental effects are monitored and, when necessary, intervention takes place

### **2. As little burden as possible is placed on the environment**

- All action is taken on nature's terms, any kind of burdening the environment is refrained from
- The target is environmentally friendly and litter-free hiking
- Firewood is used sparingly
- Emissions in water and the air are minimised and renewable energy sources are favoured
- Metsähallitus and the entrepreneurs set a good example of environmental protection

### **3. Local culture and traditions are appreciated**

- Visitors are encouraged to find out about the local culture with an open mind
- The local culture is taken into account as far as possible in the supply of information and opportunities for experiences
- Guides who know the local conditions well are used in the services

### **4. Customers are appreciated and their knowledge of nature and culture increases**

- Information is acquired beforehand
- Information can be found easily and is offered in an interesting way
- Visitors are given the opportunity to participate in the area's management
- Guides are well trained

**5. Customers' opportunities for finding recreation in nature are improved**

- All recreational users of nature are taken into account
- Services are suited to demand and destination
- Peace and quiet in nature and guided nature excursions are offered
- Tourism products are developed together with enterprises

**6. Customers' mental and physical well-being is strengthened**

- We favour travelling by muscular strength without motor vehicles
- Visitors are encouraged to make sure that they carry appropriate hiking equipment
- Both easy and demanding excursion destinations are available
- An opportunity to enjoy the wonders of nature is on offer
- The structures, trails and programme services are safe

**7. A positive effect on the local economy and employment is made**

- The products and services of local enterprises are used as much as possible
- Locals are employed as far as possible, without discarding the fact that ideas and people coming from elsewhere may also be a valuable resource in developing the home district

**8. Communication and marketing are high in quality and responsible**

- Information is reliable
- Communication is open and interactive
- Marketing is not inconsistent with nature conservation

**9. Operations are planned and implemented cooperatively**

- Customers' opinions are important
- Training is organised together with enterprises
- Everyone who is interested is given an opportunity to participate in planning
- In cooperation, priority is given to those who commit themselves to the principles of sustainable nature tourism.

## Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) Indicators for Oulanka National Park

PRINCIPLE (goals)	INDICATOR	METHOD
<b>1. Natural heritage is preserved and the activities promote nature conservation:</b> tourism and recreational use do not endanger threatened or rare species; nature-based tourism promotes, or at least does not deteriorate, landscape values.	Inhabited territories of the golden eagle and osprey in the Oulanka area (mainly in the park)	Monitoring nesting
	Size of the trout population in River Oulankajoki (Spawning population migrating to Kiutaköngäs )	FGFRI population monitoring
	The coverage area of the trail networks (in hectares) per Park's square area (in hectares)	GIS-analysis (100 m buffer on trails, 500 m on roads)
<b>2. As little burden as possible is placed on the environment:</b> the wear on the terrain is within acceptable limits, marked trails and maintained structures are used when present, environmentally friendly hiking is common, firewood is used sparingly.	Average width of trails (cm)	Trail monitoring, Oulanka method
	Average depth of trails (cm)	Trail monitoring
	Extent to which visitors have been disturbed by the erosion	Visitor survey
	Litter in the terrain, amount of litter per km	Trail monitoring
	Extent to which visitors have been disturbed by litter	Visitor survey
	The consumption of firewood at rest spots per amount of visitors per 5 years. (m <sup>3</sup> per 1000 visits).	Monitoring firewood consumption, Visitor ratings.
<b>3. Local culture and traditions are appreciated:</b> The operations of Metsähallitus and its cooperating enterprises are locally acceptable.	The number of tourism cooperation agreements	Information system for the trails used by an enterprise within forestry or protected areas (VUOKRA)
	The significance of cultural heritage to a company's operations: Will expertise in cultural heritage bring added value?	Enterprise survey
<b>4. Customers are appreciated and their knowledge of nature and culture increases:</b> customers know the special characteristics of the local culture, they are interested in nature, they ask questions and acquire additional information, nature is an important motive for travelling.	The importance of experiencing the nature for the visitors?	Visitor survey
	The Visitor Centres's visitor number per year (Oulanka, Hautajärvi)	Visitor ratings
	The importance of cultural heritage of the area for the visitors?	Visitor survey
<b>5. Customers' opportunities for finding recreation in nature are improved:</b> maintaining a high-quality and welcoming recreational environment, taking other customers into account.	Extent to which visitors have been disturbed by visitor volume.	Visitor survey
	Visitor satisfaction index	Visitor survey
	Extent to which visitors have been disturbed by behaviour of other visitors.	Visitor survey

### APPENDIX 3. 2(2)

<b>6. Customers' mental and physical well-being is strengthened:</b> visitors feel that they are revived in nature, visitors gain personal experiences and inspiration in nature, the safety of the service structures is guaranteed.	How important is relaxation is for the visitors?	Visitor survey
	The condition of the service structures (% value good/average/bad)	Buildings, structures and trails information system (REISKA)
<b>7. There is a positive effect on the local economy and employment:</b> The nature tourism that takes place in Oulanka promotes the area's economy.	The effect of visitors' spending on the area's economy (euros/year), when national park is the most important destination of the trip.	Visitor survey, customer information storage system (ASTA)
<b>8. Communication and marketing are high in quality and responsible:</b> telling customers openly and comprehensively what actions are and are not appropriate in the Protected Areas.	Visitor satisfaction: The fulfilment of visitors' expectations.	Visitor survey
<b>9. Operations are planned and implemented cooperatively:</b> The cooperation between Metsähallitus and tourism enterprises is easy and interactive, customer feedback is collected and processed, interest group cooperation is good and regular.	Cooperating enterprises' assessment of Metsähallitus Natural Heritage Services's operations (from 1 to 5)	Enterprise feedback

## PAN Parks Local Business Partner Verification Process

The PAN Parks Local Business Partner certificate is a label that is only granted to businesses who make special efforts, but it gives holders a privileged market status compared to other entrepreneurs.

When working with a national park certified by PAN Parks, such as Oulanka, entrepreneurs can have their businesses certified by PAN Parks as PAN Parks Local Business Partners. The PAN Parks Foundation issues a PAN Parks partnership certificate, while the Oulanka Cooperation Group verifies local partners according to the **PAN Parks certificate application process** illustrated in Figure 1. The pricing and conditions for PAN Parks certification are defined in agreements between the PAN Parks Foundation and individual businesses, and in the related guidelines.

Any company with an existing cooperation agreement with Metsähallitus may apply to become a PAN Parks Local Business Partner. In addition to tour operators, this may also apply to hotels and other accommodation providers, transport companies and souvenir shops, which may not necessarily themselves arrange excursions in natural settings for their customers, and whose business may take place entirely outside the national park. The services that they provide must nevertheless be located within Oulanka's sphere of influence (the Kuusamo Lapland tourism region), and must clearly form part of the service chains required by Oulanka's clients.

During the years 2005–2006 the certificates granted to Oulanka's local partners were valid for fixed terms, but in future they will be valid indefinitely. At the moment Oulanka has 12 PAN Park Local Business Partners, but some of them have reshaped their activities and no longer have active connections with the park. Following the approval of this tourism strategy, the national park's PAN Parks Coordinator will go through the present partnerships to ascertain which will be continued. The relevant certificates will then be renewed in 2012 simultaneously with the joint verification of the twin parks of Oulanka and Paanajärvi.

PAN Parks Principles and Criteria (P&C 5) set the following requirements for certified business partners:

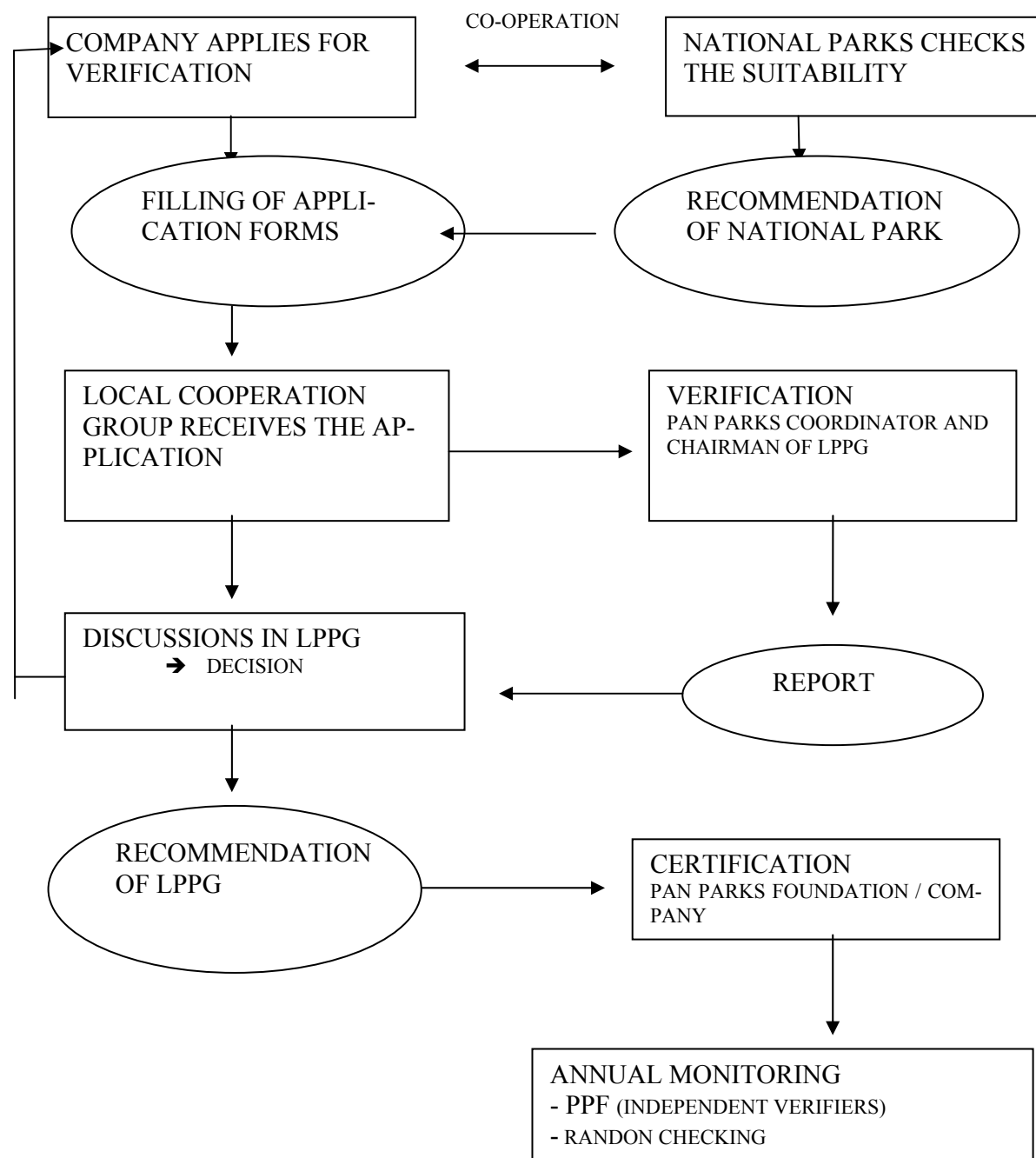
- the company must observe national legislation and standards applying to its business sector
- the company must be committed to PAN Parks' principles and goals
- the company must support Oulanka National Park and be committed to the park's management plan
- the company must be committed to the principles of sustainable tourism applied in the area
- the company must use the best possible quality assurance
- any subcontractors must also satisfy environmental requirements.

The Oulanka Cooperation Group monitors continued compliance with these criteria by examining reports submitted by the businesses. Independent PAN Parks Foundation verifiers also make monitoring visits to certified businesses on a spot check basis. These checks are run in conjunction with the monitoring of Oulanka National Park. The PAN Park certificate will be withdrawn if a company does not fulfill the criteria and fails to take corrective action within a specified period.

Various international and national operators, including regional incoming tour operators, are also involved in PAN Parks cooperation. In such cases their suitability for the PAN Parks network is evaluated by the PAN Parks Foundation, which then defines partnership agreements together with the companies concerned.

## PAN Parks Local Partner -Verification

### Process:



**Picture 1.** PAN Parks Local Business Partner -verification process.

## Endorsement

**THIS STRATEGY IS ENDORSED BY THE OULANKA  
COOPERATION GROUP**

Hautajärvi 23.02.2011,

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**Pekka Huhtala, pj.**  
Municipality of Salla

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**Mika Perttunen**  
Naturpolis Ltd.

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**Anne Murto**  
Ruka-Kuusamo tourism association

---

**Paula Aspholm-Heimonen**  
Matkalla Sallaan tourism association

---

**Arja Kilpivaara**  
Käylä village

---

**Pekka Huhtala**  
Hautajärvi village

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**Risto Sola**  
NGO Kuusamon luonnonystävät

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**Sari Alatossava**  
Metsähallitus

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**Matti Hovi**  
Metsähallitus

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