Mining projects in the vicinity of the World Heritage property “Laponian Area,” Sweden

Dear Mr. Rao,

The Swedish National Heritage Board and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency are writing in response to a letter from the World Heritage Center (CLT/WHC/6155/SE/JSW, 12 February 2013) regarding the State of conservation of the World Heritage property “Laponian Area.” Concerns about mining projects situated near to and within the World Heritage property were expressed to the World Heritage Centre in a letter from a landowner and members of three Sami villages (4 February 2013). The Swedish National Heritage Board and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency share the responsibility of handling questions linked to the World Heritage Convention after it was ratified by Sweden in 1986. The Swedish National Heritage Board has the overall responsibility of following the World Heritage Convention and its implementation. The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency is the authority responsible for the natural heritage of Sweden’s World Heritage properties. As the “Laponian Area” is a mixed property, both authorities are jointly submitting information requested by the World Heritage Centre concerning the question of mining projects in the vicinity of the “Laponian Area,” Sweden.

The following information is compiled from comments provided by the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten. These and additional information on the processes linked to mining projects are the basis for Sweden’s evaluation of potential impact to this property’s Outstanding Universal Values.

Short summary of the current situation
The concerns expressed in the 4 February 2013 letter to the World Heritage Centre mainly involve the question of potential threats to the property “Laponian Area” from two mining projects: Ruoutevare and Kallak (see map, Attachment 1).
While the information UNESCO and the World Heritage Centre requested (12 February 2013) was being compiled, the situation of both mining projects has changed. The Swedish National Heritage Board and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency both feel that it is important to update UNESCO and the World Heritage Centre on the current situation as it is also relevant to the above mentioned correspondence.

Ruoutevare
The Swedish National Heritage Board and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency are pleased to be able to inform UNESCO and the World Heritage Centre that the Exploitation Permit for Ruoutevare, the project situated in and adjacent to the southwest boundary of the World Heritage property, has now expired. No additional applications for permits have been submitted, and no work at Ruoutevare is underway. It is our understanding that the project at Ruoutevare can no longer pose any direct threat to the Outstanding Universal Values of the “Laponian Area.”

Kallak
The situation of the project at Kallak, situated ca. 30 kilometres south-southeast of the southeastern boundary of the “Laponian Area,” also has recently changed. Initially, the work at Kallak has been carried out within the limits of an Exploration Permit where the entrepreneur is obligated to work in a way that minimizes possible damage and effects to the natural and cultural values. The Kallak project was also granted a permit according to the Environmental Code for a sample mine. However, this permit was heavily restricted – both temporally and geographically – in order to ensure minimal effect to reindeer herding activities in the area. The Swedish National Heritage Board and the Swedish Environmental Agency deem that these investigations at Kallak are unlikely to pose any threat to the Outstanding Universal Values of the “Laponian Area.”

The Swedish National Heritage Board and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency have now received information that JIMAB Jokkmokk Iron Mines AB has submitted an application (16 May 2013) to the Mining Inspectorate of Sweden for an Exploitation Concession for rights to mine iron ore at Kallak. The entrepreneur has also included an Environmental Impact Assessment as part of this application.

Exploitation Concessions are granted by the Swedish Mining Inspector in consultation with the County Administrative Board. The County Administrative
Board of Norrbotten is responsible for evaluating the suitability of land use and the Environmental Impact Assessment submitted by JIMAB Jökkmokk Iron Mines AB.

The Swedish National Heritage Board and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency would like to take this opportunity to give UNESCO and the World Heritage Center additional information and insight into the comprehensive process involved in evaluating and granting permits related to mining activities in Sweden.

Background – planning, official consideration and approval for mining activities in Sweden
Locating economically productive minerals for commercial mining activities is a comprehensive process requiring competence, capital and access to a large geographical area. Also the process of official consideration and approval of mining activities is comprehensive. An entrepreneur is required to obtain several approvals and permits from different authorities between beginning activities of exploration, the evaluation of potentially economically interesting finds and the establishment of a mine. Permits for mining activities are evaluated in relation to national legislation including the Minerals Act, the Environmental Code and the Planning and Building Act.

An Exploration Permit allows the entrepreneur to sample surface rocks and soil and take measurements using various instruments. When a potentially interesting area is located and drilling is required, this is restricted to a limited part of the area of investigation. Exploration Permits are granted by the Swedish Mining Inspector, and with such a permit the entrepreneur is obligated to work in a way that minimizes possible damage and effects to the natural and cultural values.

A Permit according to the Environmental Code for a sample mine is necessary when larger samples need to be taken in order to evaluate a material's characteristics with respect to refining potential. Sample mines have a greater impact on the environment than the exploration work described above, but in relation to a full-scale mine these are still considered very small. Applications for Permits according to the Environmental Code are subjected to consideration and approval by the legal unit of the County Administration Board.

An Exploitation Concession must be obtained before an entrepreneur may proceed with any mining activities. Exploitation Concessions are granted by the Swedish Mining Inspector in consultation with the County Administrative Board.
The Mining Inspector evaluates the area's economic potential and the suitability of the entrepreneur; the County Administrative Board evaluates the suitability of land use. According to the Environmental Code, mining activities require a permit which is determined by the Environmental Court of Sweden. In this process, the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency may state an opinion and appeal a decision.

Importantly, Exploitation Concessions have particular national relevance. In instances when the views of the Mining Inspector disagree with the view of the County Administrative Board regarding the question of suitable land use, the decision of whether an Exploitation Concession should be granted becomes the responsibility of the Swedish Government.

Further detailed English language information about the Mining Inspectorate of Sweden, the Minerals Act and the above described processes, permits and their implications with regard to the question of potential impact to Sweden's World Heritage properties may be accessed at www.bergsstaten.se/index_e.htm, the homepage of the Swedish Mining Inspectorate.

Comments on present situation
The Swedish National Heritage Board and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency view the discontinuation of activity at Ruutavare within the World Heritage property as a positive development and one which will remove any possible direct threat to the Outstanding Universal Values of the “Laponian Area.”

The application for an Exploitation Concession submitted to the Swedish Mining Inspectorate in mid-May 2013 by JIMAB Jokkmokk Iron Mines AB for continued activity at Kallak initiates a new stage in the process of consideration and approval for activity in that area.

As yet, no irreversible decisions have been made regarding this application, and no timetable for the process of consideration and approval has yet been presented. The County Administrative Board of Norrbotten is responsible for evaluating the suitability of land use and the Environmental Impact Assessment submitted by JIMAB Jokkmokk Iron Mines AB. The geographical area this application involves is Kallak, located outside and ca. 30 kilometres south-southeast of the boundary of the “Laponian Area,” which means that this activity will not exert any physical impact on the World Heritage property itself. Instead,
the question of potential threats is more directed toward its effects on reindeer
herding and the Outstanding Universal Values of criterion (iii) and (v).

The Swedish National Heritage Board and the Swedish Environmental Protection
Agency would like to thank the World Heritage Center for its inquiries in this
matter. We hope that the information we have provided here explains the current
situation and changes since February 2013. We also hope that we have been able
to give useful further insight into the processes of planning and consideration
which must be carried out prior to making any decisions regarding permits for
further exploration in the Kallak area.

The Swedish National Heritage Board and the Swedish Environmental Protection
Agency are both closely following the advancements in this matter, particularly in
instances that may possibly influence the Outstanding Universal Values of the
World Heritage property "Laponian Area." The Swedish National Heritage Board
and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency will be keeping UNESCO and
the World Heritage Centre informed of developments in this situation.

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