



Þingvellir National Park

Management Plan 2004 to 2024





Agreed by the Þingvellir Commission, June 2nd 2004

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Member of Parliament

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FOREWORD

Developments with regard to Pingvellir have been satisfactory of late. Extensive, and rewarding, work was involved in defining and explaining the status of this shrine of the Icelandic nation to UNESCO experts, in connection with the application for Pingvellir to be listed on the World Heritage List. The final touches were put to new legalisation on Pingvellir, and a considerable extension of the national park. Finally, a management plan and operational plan for the next twenty years for the national park have been prepared, taking account of Pingvellir's anticipated status on the World Heritage List and the new Pingvellir Act. The aim of the management plan is to promote the position of Pingvellir yet further, both among the Icelandic nation and internationally.

As I present, on behalf of the Pingvellir Commission, this management plan and operational plan for the Pingvellir National Park for the period until 2024, above all I feel gratitude to all those who have been involved in this project for the Commission.

The consultancy company Alta ehf. provided specialist services in the development of the management plan, and consultative meetings were held with representatives of nearly 80 organisations and other stakeholders. National Park staff have been involved in the planning process, led by director Sigurður K. Oddsson, Head Warden Guðrún St. Kristinsdóttur and Interpretive Manager Einar Á. E. Sæmundsen.

During this process it emerged, as so often before, that Pingvellir is dear to the hearts of many people. The Pingvellir Commission is of the view that this management plan is an effective and realistic response to that feeling. If the new management plan is followed through, Pingvellir has a bright future in store.

Björn Bjarnason,
Chair of the Pingvellir Commission



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1. SUMMARY

In the management plan put forward here for the Pingvellir National Park, the factors emphasised are broadly similar to those of the prior management plan of 1988. As before, the most important objective is to safeguard the nature, historical area and heritage sites of the National Park for the future, while also making preparations for visitors, whose numbers may be expected to rise steadily.

The management plan is based upon a vision for the period until 2024. The situation in the current year in the main fields is summarised, and this is followed by an exposition of the principal objectives which must be achieved in order to make the vision a reality.

In the 1990s, systematic development of facilities and services commenced; it is fair to say that this was a prerequisite for the national park to be able to receive a fast-growing number of guests in recent years, without serious consequences. This management plan stresses the importance of further planning and monitoring, in order to make better use of the existing infrastructure and facilities, and to expand these factors without more encroachment on nature than has already taken place. In addition, emphasis is placed upon visitors having access to education on the unique interplay of history and nature to be found at Pingvellir.

The policymaking work involved extensive consultation with visitors to the national park and many stakeholders. This provided a veritable mine of information on the attitudes and ideas on which the management plan is based; the policymakers have striven to reflect the main messages of this consultation in the management plan.

The management plan is accompanied by an operational plan, which will be renewed every five years. The intention is that the effectiveness of management of the national park be evaluated in tandem with the renewal of the operational plan.

2. INTRODUCTION

The Pingvellir National Park was founded by legislation passed by Alþingi (parliament) in 1928. The Act says: "From the beginning of 1930 Pingvellir by the Óxará river and its vicinity shall be a protected national shrine for all Icelanders." In 1988 a management plan was drawn up for the national park, and the time has come to prepare a new management plan, taking account of what has been achieved in recent years. The Icelandic government has applied to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee (WHC), nominating Pingvellir for inclusion on the World Heritage List. Sites included on the World Heritage List are internationally recognised conservation areas, which are generally major tourist attractions. Pingvellir is nominated for the World Heritage List on grounds of its unique cultural landscape.

This document contains the Pingvellir Commission's management plan and vision for the national park for the next twenty years, which provides guidance on the interaction of protection and utilisation, planning and operations.

In the creation of the management plan, extensive consultation was carried out with many stakeholders, and the views of visitors to the national park were elicited on their experience. Almost universally the view was expressed that the nature and appearance of Pingvellir should be safeguarded, while visitors should also be offered the opportunity to enjoy what the place has to offer, and to learn.

The form in which the management plan is put forward is in accord with guidelines from IUCN, the World Conservation Union. Visions and objectives are described in certain fields which differ from each other, but which come together in the multifaceted role of the national park. The text is partly drawn from the nomination document submitted to UNESCO.



In pursuance of this management plan, an operational plan has been prepared for the next five years, and such plans will be regularly renewed for the duration of the management plan.

3. DESCRIPTION OF NATIONAL PARK

3.1. Basic information

The Þingvellir National Park is located in the southwest region of Iceland, in the Bláskógabyggð municipality, about 50 km from the capital, Reykjavík. The boundaries of the national park are shown on Map I in Annex B.

The area of the national park is 237 km²; its boundaries are defined in the new Þingvellir National Park Act of May 2004¹. The national park was established by legislation on the protection of Þingvellir in 1928; it was the first conservation area in Iceland. According to the guidelines of IUCN, the World Conservation Union, Þingvellir falls within the definition of category II of conservation areas: national parks. The objective of conservation of the areas covered by this category is mainly ecosystem protection and recreation.

3.2. National park administration

Administratively the national park is under the aegis of the Prime Minister's Office, but is governed by the Þingvellir Commission, comprising three members of parliament. According to the new Act of May 2004, the Þingvellir commission will comprise seven members of parliament following the next parliament election. The commission's address is:

Þingvallanefnd (Þingvellir Commission)
Hverfisgata 4a
101 Reykjavík

At the time of publication of this management plan the Þingvellir Commission comprises the following members of parliament:

Björn Bjarnason, Minister of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs, Chair
Guðni Ágústsson, Minister of Agriculture
Óssur Skarphéðinsson, Member of Parliament

The Þingvellir Commission appoints a director for the national park, who is responsible for day-to-day operations, together with the head warden and interpretive manager.

The director of the national park is Sigurður Oddsson.
The head warden is Guðrún Kristinsdóttir
The interpretive manager is Einar Á. E. Sæmundsen

Office of the director of the national park:

Tel: +354 552 1730

The postal address of the national park is:

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Þjónustumiðstöð
801 Selfoss

Contact numbers for the management office:

Tel: +354 482 2660
Fax: +354 482 3635
Website: www.thingvellir.is
e-mail: thingvellir@thingvellir.is

¹ As this management plan was signed and issued, publication and reference number of the new law was still pending.

The following agencies have a mandated role to play in matters concerning the national park:

Archaeological Preservation Agency (www.fornleifavernd.is)
 Environment and Food Agency (www.ust.is)
 Bláskógabyggð local authority (blaskogabyggd.is)

3.3. Land use, access and service

The few residents within the national park live on two farms west of the rift valley, which is the focus of the national park, while in two areas there are also some summer cabins. No business is permanently established within the national park, with the exception of those companies which run hotel and catering facilities.

Route 36 is the main link between the national park and the capital and adjacent areas, and almost all visitors arrive by this route. The national park is also on route 52, the Uxahryggir-Kaldidalur road, which is a mountain road with little traffic, and closed in winter. These routes intersect at the service centre at Leirar. In addition, route 365 connects the national park to the Laugarvatn area.

Visitors have two main reasons for visiting the national park. On the one hand they wish to see the heritage site where parliament assembled in olden times, and on the other hand they wish to spend time in the open air and enjoy the natural beauty of the place. The vast majority of visitors to the park come in the summer months, from June to August.

Around the parliamentary site are four car parks, where visitors can leave their vehicles and enter the site on foot. Along the shore of Þingvallavatn (Þingvellir Lake) are another six car parks, while in many places by the roads lay-bys provide space for one or two cars.

Bridle paths and footpaths lead into the national park from west, east and north. Two bridle paths lead through the national park, and at Skógarhólar is a waystation for horse-riders in the area. Various popular walking routes connect to the national park, such as the route from Hvalfjörður via Leggjabrjótur.

The parliamentary site, located east of the Almannagjá gorge, is about five hectares in area. The vast majority of visitors to Þingvellir come to the parliamentary site, and hence this is the area under the greatest pressure, so paths are widest and best signposted here.

Along the shore of Þingvellir Lake, encroachment by visitors has left clear signs of wear. The principal footpaths along the lakeside have not been formally laid, but have been gradually trodden over the years. Angling permits are sold at the service centre, and national park staff monitor the angling.

The national park's network of paths is quite extensive, especially in the Þingvellir lava field. Many of the paths are ancient routes used by those who attended parliament, and leading between former farms.

At Leirar, at the junction of routes 36 and 52, is the national park service centre. This includes an information service, a specialist bookshop run by the national park, and privately-run catering. North of the centre is the national park's staff accommodation.

The national park interpretive centre is located on the western edge of the Almannagjá gorge, Hakið, whence visitors can walk down into Almannagjá. In the interpretive centre multimedia technology is used to present Þingvellir's cultural history and nature. Admission to the presentation is free.

Two campsites are located in the national park. The larger of the campsites comprises a number of smaller sites around the service centre, with facilities for motor homes (RVs), trailer-tents and tents. A smaller campsite is located at Vatnaskot by Þingvellir Lake, in the middle of the shoreline; this can also accommodate motor homes (RVs), trailer-tents and tents. In addition, there is a

campsite at Skógarhólar, the waystation for riders, but this is mostly used by visitors who arrive on horseback.

The national park has lavatory facilities at the interpretive centre and service centre and at the campsites. Guests at the campsite by the service centre have access to showers and laundry facilities.

One hotel, Hotel Valhöll, is located within the national park. Originally built in 1899, it was moved to its present location in 1929. The building has since been extended. It has 30 guest rooms, a restaurant, and meeting and function facilities. The buildings and land are owned by the Icelandic state, while the business is privately run.

3.4. Nature

Iceland lies at the junction of two tectonic plates which are diverging and slipping. In such areas, rift valleys often form between the plates; in general these are hard to discern, as they rapidly fill with lava which levels the surface. At Pingvellir, however, a rift valley of this nature is unusually clearly discernible, due to the fact that over the past 100,000 years subsidence and divergence in the rift valley have been accompanied by little volcanic activity. Deep fissures have also formed in the surface of the earth's crust; these are more clearly seen at Pingvellir than anywhere else in Iceland. Due to continental drift, the fissures at Pingvellir are widening by an average of 3 mm annually.

The majority of the national park area is covered in lava, which flowed from a shield volcano east of the rift valley about 10,000 years ago; the pile of lava strata is clearly visible in the Almannagjá gorge.

Pingvellir Lake is the largest natural lake in Iceland, with an area of 83 km²; a small proportion of the lake falls within the national park. The ecosystem of the lake reflects the fact that it lies at the junction of two continents, Europe and America. The bird that tokens the lake is the great northern diver or common loon (*Gavia immer*), an American species whose only European breeding place is in Iceland. The white-tailed eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) used to breed by the lake also, and is occasionally seen there today. Minks reside by the lake, and arctic foxes are seen from time to time.

3.5. Cultural landscape and heritage sites

Alþingi (parliament) was founded at Pingvellir in 930 AD, and ever since then the place has been inseparably united with the history of Iceland and the Icelanders. Many traces remain at Pingvellir of activity relating to the parliamentary assembly; remains are visible of at least 50 booths (semi-permanent shelters) and other structures built by those who attended Alþingi. In addition to the accommodation of those attending parliament, there were also booths for tanners, brewers, victuallers etc. The walls of booths were built of turf and rock, atop which a wooden frame supported a tented roof of woollen fabric. Remains of booths are typical for assembly sites, and Pingvellir is the largest and most important such site.

Walls of booths were probably built from materials available nearby, while in later times the ruins of older booths were re-used. New booths were often constructed on the ruins of older ones. Thus low mounds of ruins gradually developed in the most popular areas, where the majority of those who attended parliament stayed. Traces of booths from different times may be seen; most of the ruins visible on the surface at Pingvellir today date from the 17th and 18th centuries.

The ruins do not give an entirely accurate picture of the size of the assembly or the number of people who attended it, as many did not build booths, but stayed in tents, and thus left little trace of their presence.

The principal heritage sites are in the area where Alþingi assembled. Heritage sites are also found in many other parts of the national park, especially around deserted farms in the Pingvellir lava field.

- The largest group of archaeological remains is on the plain beneath *Hallurinn* (the Slope), where many ruins of booths may be seen, arranged in rows and clusters, in an area of about 200 x 300 m. The most recent ruins are clearest, while remnants of three or four layers of older ruins may be seen projecting from them. Among them are ruins of the *Lögrétta* (the Law Council).
- At the top of the slope is a man-made platform. This is believed to be the remains of the old *Lögberg* (Law Rock). Close by is *Snorrabúð*, named after the chieftain Snorri.
- The third collection of ruins consists of booths in the Almannagjá gorge, most of them from the latter centuries of the Alþingi.
- On the eastern side of the river, adjacent to the churchyard, are extensive ruins of booths known as *Biskupabúðir* (Bishops' Booths).
- At some distance are old man-made structures on *Spöngin* (the Neck), a narrow strip of land between the Nikulásargjá and Flosagjá fissures.

Many heritage sites have been preserved at Þingvellir which are associated with habitation and daily labour, as well as ruins connected to the old assembly. On the surface, traces of outhouses, sheep pens, enclosures and abandoned farms may clearly be seen in many parts of the area. Within the national park, an unusually complete cultural landscape of the 18th and 19th centuries is preserved, providing interesting insight into rural life before mechanisation. This is accompanied with a wealth of placenames relating to farming and utilisation of natural resources, in addition to those placenames which are derived from parliamentary activities.

4. IMPORTANCE AND SIGNIFICANCE

Þingvellir is a protected national shrine, and a symbol of Icelandic national unity.

Þingvellir is one of the most important cultural heritage sites in Iceland, where the main strands of Icelandic history have been woven from the start of the settlement in the 9th century to the present day. The story of Þingvellir, from the establishment of the Alþingi around 930 AD, provides insight into how a Viking Age pioneer community organized its society from scratch and then evolved. Þingvellir also combines in a single place an assortment of natural phenomena which only a handful of places on Earth can boast. The interplay of history and the extraordinary natural setting make this a unique place.

Þingvellir has been nominated for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List as an area with a unique cultural landscape. This is on the basis of the following:

- The Alþingi at Þingvellir preserves the history of a parliament at the cusp of the early and high middle ages, and sheds light on Viking Age notions of polity, law and authority, since in Iceland the creation of a new pioneer society and a flourishing literary culture went hand in hand. These ideas, which were the common heritage of the Germanic peoples, have played a major role in shaping systems of government in many European countries up to the present day. The historic site at Þingvellir is unique in that remains dating from the very beginning of the Alþingi can be found there. These are the only ruins that show the overall layout of an assembly site from this time, and the only assembly ruins so clearly visible at the surface.
- At Þingvellir natural features and unique geological characteristics at a tectonic plate boundary have created the setting for an extraordinary history, a setting almost unchanged from the time when the Alþingi was first established. The environment at Þingvellir and its natural heritage have played a powerful role in inspiring great scholarly, artistic and literary work, and been central in the making of the Icelandic nation.

4.1. Setting for history and culture

The pioneer society that came into existence when the Alþingi was established around 930 AD is the only society in Europe for which such detailed records exist of the earliest origins, along with remarkable archaeological remains to support them. The history which has thus been passed down regarding parliamentary procedure during the Old Commonwealth age (930-1263/64) sheds light on important elements in European constitutional development, all of which are linked directly or indirectly to the growth and ascendancy of the rule of law, and can clarify our understanding of them. The oldest extant historical work in Icelandic, the Book of Icelanders (*Íslendingabók*) by Ari Þorgilsson the Wise, written 1120-1130, is the prime source of information about the settlement and the origins of Iceland's nation state and parliament at Pingvellir. The establishment of a single assembly for the whole country was unique to Iceland. Pingvellir, chosen to be the site of Alþingi, was, for the two weeks of the parliament session each year, the equivalent of an administrative capital.

One of the unique aspects of the Alþingi was the particular emphasis and detailed attention given to removing legal uncertainty and resolving disputes, in the absence of an executive power. This is evident, for instance, in the important roles played by the *lögsögumaður* (Lawspeaker) and *lögrétta* (Law Council). There are extensive and detailed sources on the organisation of the assembly and its working procedures. The legal code of the Old Commonwealth, known as *Grágás*, is one of the most remarkable legal codices among the medieval Germanic peoples. One section of this codex is actually considered to be the first known writing of the Icelandic language, some two hundred years after the establishment of the Alþingi.

The Icelandic Alþingi has a longer continuous history than any other medieval parliament, with the possible exception of the parliaments in the Faroe Islands and on the Isle of Man; historical sources on these assemblies are limited.

In shaping their new society, the Viking Age settlers of Iceland had to ponder more clearly the concepts underlying the society than those who remained in their homeland, who could continue to adhere to ancient customs without paying any particular attention to them. Iceland is unusual in that the Viking Age was perpetuated in such cultural factors as social structure, administrative procedures and political philosophy of the Old Commonwealth. Thus medieval notions of law and authority are seen in especially clear form in Iceland. The Old Commonwealth of Iceland, founded by the first settlers, has been called the first European state in the New World, and a precursor of those that would later be instituted on the other side of the Atlantic.

The historical site of the Alþingi at Pingvellir is unparalleled in the world. Pingvellir is remarkable as the only Germanic assembly site where remains of administrative structures such as *Lögberg* (Law Rock), *Lögrétta* (Law Council) and *Biskupabúðir* (Bishops' Booths) have been preserved. Remains of many man-made structures pertaining to parliament and its functions, dating from the 10th to 18th centuries, can be found there. In its entirety, the historical site at Pingvellir is also unique, in that traces of a large part of the attendees' booths can still be seen on the surface and the overall layout of the assembly area can still be visualised.

4.2. Unique natural factors

Pingvellir is unique from a geological perspective. Its geological uniqueness lies primarily in the fact that in few (or no) other places in the world are tectonic plate boundaries so clearly discernible on dry land. The fissures which are characteristic

of the geology of Þingvellir form where two continental plates are moving apart, as the land between them rifts and subsides. The Þingvellir rift valley can be particularly clearly seen on the surface, and was cited as an example when the theory of plate tectonics – the foundation for modern understanding of geological processes and land formation – was being developed.

The Þingvellir rift is the clearest example on dry land where plate separation on an oceanic ridge can be seen and grasped. Þingvellir and the environs of Þingvellir Lake are thus of outstanding value as a geological monument, not only for Iceland but also globally.

The ecosystem of Þingvellir Lake is unique in the world. Four separate morphs of Arctic char have evolved there, and the lake also has a distinctive stock of brown trout which is well known for its longevity and large size. The trout, which can reach sizes of thirty pounds and more, is believed to have become trapped in the lake shortly after the end of the Ice Age, when the land mass rose.

The *gjábleikja* or “fissure char” is a unique breed of small char found in fissures in the park, which appears to have evolved in the fissure swarm which follows the volcanic zone that lies across Iceland, from the southwest corner via the highlands to the northeast of the island. The breed is best known in the national park area, where the fissures lead out into the lake.

Precipitation is heavy in the catchment area. About nine-tenths of the water that flows into Þingvellir Lake passes underground via fissures into the lake. The fact that the lava is of recent age means that the groundwater absorbs ample quantities of minerals, and this is one of the contributory factors in the diverse ecosystem of the lake. Due to subsidence and lava fields, a large variety of habitats have been formed, such as hiding places for fish in fissures and hollows along the shore of the lake. Þingvellir Lake is remarkably fertile and eutrophic, although it is very cold. About one-third of the lake bottom is covered with vegetation, and the lake abounds in algae. Low-growing vegetation extends to depths of about ten metres, while extensive belts of tall vegetation grow at depths of ten to thirty metres. A total of about 150 species of algae and vascular plants and 50 species of microorganisms have been identified from the lake shore down to great depths. At Vellankatla at the east of the lake, where large quantities of water flow from under the lava field, the only known cave-dwelling creature in northern Europe was recently discovered: a pale, sightless amphipod of American origin. It appears to have survived in groundwater in caves beneath the Ice Age glacial cover. This is the oldest extant freshwater animal species in Iceland. Thus the biological history of Þingvellir Lake has origins stretching back hundreds of thousands of years.

5. LIMITING FACTORS

5.1. Legal and organisational framework

The Þingvellir National Park functions on the basis of the new Act of May 2004, which superseded the original Preservation of Þingvellir Act no. 59/1928. Unlike other Icelandic national parks, the Þingvellir National Park is not directly subject to the Nature Conservation Act no. 44/1999. The Þingvellir National Park Act makes clear provision for protection and maintenance of this area, which is to be “the property of the Icelandic nation.”

The Bláskógabyggð local authority is the planning authority for the area. No development is permitted, however, within the area of influence of the park, without the consent of the Þingvellir Commission. A master plan is in preparation for Bláskógabyggð for the period 2004 – 2014. Until this is approved, the national park is subject to the master plan 1995-2015 for the municipalities of



Þingvellir, Grímsnes and Grafningur; the Þingvellir rural district has now merged with the Biskupstungur and Laugardalur rural districts to form Bláskógabyggð.

The Þingvellir Commission published a management plan, *Þingvellir, Þjóðgarðurinn og umhverfi* (Þingvellir – National Park and Environs), in May 1988; the present management plan for Þingvellir 2004 to 2024 follows on from that document.

Heritage sites in the national park are subject to the National Heritage Act no. 107/2001, and are protected. Þingvellir Church is subject to the Architectural Heritage Act no. 104/2001.

In addition to the legislation referred to above, the operations of the national park must also take account of, among other things, the Nature Conservation Act no. 44/1999 with subsequent amendments. This applies particularly to provisions on conservation of the landscape and art. 37 on geological formations and ecosystems, which are especially protected, and disruption of which is to be avoided.

The above-mentioned legislation and its relevance to the Þingvellir National Park are discussed in section 4b. of the application for the inclusion of Þingvellir on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

5.1.1. Subjective restrictions

The first legislation on the national park in 1928 states that Þingvellir is a protected shrine for all Icelanders. Although nearly a century has passed since that legal text was composed, there is every indication that this is indeed the place of Þingvellir in the national consciousness. The place is hallowed ground to Icelanders in many senses, as described above, especially as a central place in Icelandic history, as the site where many archaeological remains are preserved, as the spectacular setting for historical events, and as a place of outstanding natural beauty.

The romantic sanctity of Þingvellir, related to nationalism and the campaign for independence, has to some extent given way to a new interpretation of Þingvellir as the historic setting of parliament and government in a pioneer community, in a place which is a remarkable work of nature. For these reasons it is foreseeable that any major changes to the present organisation of Þingvellir, to which the nation is accustomed, would meet with opposition. It may reasonably be deemed unthinkable that the Icelandic public could accept any major development within the national park, especially in the vicinity of the parliamentary site itself. On the other hand it is likely that a compromise may be reached on changes which entail the conservation in the main of the present organisation, while facilitating guests' enjoyment of what the national park has to offer, within the limits of conservation. This viewpoint emerges clearly from the consultation with the public and with stakeholders, on which the management plan has been partly based, and hence the plan is in accord with that viewpoint.

6. PRINCIPLES OF MANAGEMENT PLANNING

The management plan put forward here is guided by the following principles:

The Þingvellir National Park has a special status which is inseparably tied to certain places within the national park retaining their natural character, partly for the sake of nature itself, and partly due to the important events which took place as Þingvellir, traces of which have been left behind in the earth.

By its management the national park administration seeks to protect this special value, so that it will not be diminished although many visit and enjoy it. The society of present and future reaps most benefit from the national park when a reasonable compromise between conservation and utilisation is achieved. The purpose of conservation is to ensure the possibility of equivalent future use.

The main principle of the national park's management is that nature not be

disrupted beyond what has already occurred, unless the impact on the special value of the site is insignificant, and the change is conducive to utilisation relevant to the unique aspects of the national park. When the impact of management decisions relating to the balance of conservation and utilisation is unclear, conservation has priority.

In its services to visitors, the park places emphasis on outdoor activity and instruction on nature, history and the heritage sites which typify the national park beyond other places.

All man-made structures, organisation and management of the national park shall embody respect for its special status.

7. LAND USE

7.1. Vision for 2024

Land use and planning at Pingvellir have the objective of preserving the appearance, cultural landscape and ecosystem of the area, while also seeking to enable visitors to the national park to enjoy their visit. The paramount principle of planning and development in the national park is that the land and its character, ecosystems and heritage sites, be conserved in a sustainable manner. The approved local plan divides the territory of the national park into zones, each of which is clearly defined, for which conditions on the extent and appearance of man-made structures are stated. The plan also specifies what types of activity are permissible within each zone, and their extent, together with criteria which must be fulfilled regarding sustainability and environmental protection.

7.2. Zoning of the national park

The national park is divided below into zones reflecting differing use, conservation criteria and cultural significance.

The policy on land use put forward here is automatically overridden by a lawful local plan once approved. The local plan is expected to be in accord with the broad principles of this management plan.

Each zone is described, and the present situation, limits of acceptable change and policy for each are briefly explained. The zoning of the national park is shown on a map in Annex B.

Zone S1: Pingvellir lava field and other leisure areas

The Pingvellir lava field covers the majority of the area of the national park; the lava is covered with low-growing vegetation and dwarf birch. In several places coniferous trees have been planted. Within the lava field, the abandoned farmsteads of Hrauntún and Skógarkot form hubs for a network of footpaths, which are ancient routes, and thus constitute heritage sites in their own right. No new paths have been made in the area, but some of the paths have been improved by surfacing with gravel, while others are simple dirt tracks. Some of the paths are assigned for use as bridle paths. There are few paths in the northernmost sector of the lava field.

Limits of acceptable change:

The overall appearance of the zone shall not change to any noticeable degree, and traffic shall be managed in such a way that random encroachment does not have an impact on the land. Some of the paths shall be preserved as simple dirt tracks. There shall be no further spread of coniferous woods.

The policy for this zone is as follows:

There shall be no important man-made structure in the zone other than paths that harmonise well with the environment, for those who wish to walk in the lava field and enjoy the environment, or to visit the abandoned farmsteads. Skogarkot

shall be made accessible to visitors with limited mobility by means of a path which is suitable for wheelchairs.

Coniferous woods shall be thinned and confined, so that the natural vegetation of the area is allowed to thrive. The dwarf birch shall be especially examined, and consideration shall be given to the possibility of encouraging its distribution. This shall be restricted to the ecotype already present.

Heritage sites shall be maintained, and information on them provided for passers-by.

Zone S2: Leirar

The zone is at the junction of route 36 (Reykjavík-Selfoss) with route 52 (Þingvellir-Uxahryggir/Kaldidalur). In this zone a service centre for visitors is now located, along with staff facilities, the national park administrative offices and campsite. The zone is not deemed to be particularly sensitive, and there is some scope for extension of the present services if necessary, in accord with the forthcoming local plan, especially north of route 36. The road cuts the campsite off from the service centre, and hence the speed of traffic at this point must be drastically reduced.

Limits of acceptable change:

The entire zone may be developed, but in a style and appearance which harmonises as far as possible with the surroundings. Emphasis on durable, low-maintenance building materials which retain a good appearance in spite of use and weathering.

The policy for this zone is as follows:

At Leirar development shall not exceed what is necessary in order to serve a rising number of visitors, in keeping with other service in the area. Staff facilities and administrative offices will remain there.

Buildings, e.g. staff accommodation and national park offices, are to be low-rise structures north of road, as at present. On the existing campsite provision shall be made for all kinds of camping accommodation, in accord with the standards of the time, but no extension of campsites is planned.

Zone S3: Lake shore

The Lake shore is a strip of land by the lake, about 50 metres, across contiguous with the parliamentary site at the west. Along the shore, there is considerable wear and tear, and visible impact on vegetation.

Limits of acceptable change:

Along the shore the interplay of lake, lava and vegetation shall be protected, without any man-made structures other than those necessary in order to provide sufficient access for anglers and others seeking outdoor activity. The overall appearance of the zone shall not be altered noticeably, and traffic shall be managed in such a way that random encroachment does not have an impact on the land.

The policy for this zone is as follows:

Good car parks, and easy access to the lake shore from the road shall be provided. Anglers shall be directed to specified areas (angling sectors), where the surface will be altered to some extent in order to tolerate the pressure. Means shall also be sought of increasing the number of angling sites available within the national park, e.g. at Arnarfell, and also outside the park in collaboration with other landowners, thus reducing the load within the park.

The campsite at Vatnskot shall be exclusively for light tents, and closed for access by all motor vehicles, as the vegetation there is very sensitive, and easily damaged. Many important heritage sites are also located in this zone. At Vatnskot

instruction shall be provided on the heritage sites and the utilisation of the lake, and there shall be access from there to the lake shore for those with limited mobility.

Special attention must be paid to Vellankatla, where the water flowing from beneath the lava field is visible, leading to the possibility of instruction on the groundwater system of the national park.

In consultation with *Veiðifélag Þingvallavatns* (Þingvellir Lake Angling Association) a slipway shall be erected south of Arnarfell, where small boats and kayaks can be beached, at a reasonable distance from the angling areas. Such facilities would necessitate provision of car parking for boaters.

Zone S4: Parliamentary site

The parliamentary site is delimited by the Almannagjá gorge to the west, Neðri vellir to the north, Flosagjá gorge to the east and Þingvellir Lake to the south, as indicated in more detail on map II. The zone is defined as the site of the ancient Alþingi (parliament) and this is the focus of the aspects of the national park concerned with cultural history. Within the parliamentary site there are many archaeological remains, including traces of the booths (semi-permanent shelters) erected by those who attended the assembly during the last centuries of the Alþingi at Þingvellir, before 1800. Three buildings are located within the parliamentary site: Þingvellir Church, Þingvellir Manorhouse, and Hotel Valhöll. The manorhouse is used by clergymen when they hold religious services in the church, and by the director of the national park, and it is also an official residence of the prime minister, with facilities to hold receptions for visiting dignitaries. The manorhouse and church are in excellent condition after extensive renovations in recent years, but Hotel Valhöll requires extensive and costly renovation work if it is to remain standing. The land within the parliamentary site is constantly subsiding, and in addition there is a constant risk of sudden subsidence during earthquakes – as has been seen over the centuries.

Limits of acceptable change:

The uniqueness of the parliamentary site consists on the one hand in its history and archaeological remains, and on the other hand in the geological formations within which that history took place. Acceptable change is thus restricted primarily by the constraints of conservation of archaeological remains, and the respect which they should be shown. The natural environment and vegetation must also be conserved, as the visible setting of that history, without distracting attention toward irrelevant man-made structures.

The policy for this zone is as follows:

It is important that traffic through the parliamentary site be confined to well-made paths which lead visitors to points of interest. Along the paths instruction is provided to visitors, e.g. by means of signs and other media, which tie the history to its setting.

The operational premisses of a hotel in Valhöll must be reconsidered, taking account of the maintenance of the building, seasonal fluctuations in numbers of guests, and technical factors such as drainage. The aim will be that the scale of activities at the location where Valhöll now stands be changed, so that hotel operations will be reduced, while the emphasis will be on catering; in addition, plans should provide for facilities for Alþingi (parliament) and the government to hold meetings, and for other parties who wish to hold functions or seminars. The accommodation is to be adapted to these uses, although hotel accommodation need not be closed down entirely.

Þingvellir manorhouse is now utilised by the prime minister's office, and also has facilities for the director of the national park and for clergy. Plans should be made for the prime minister to be provided with facilities elsewhere in the national park, while the use of the manorhouse should reflect the fact that it is located where visitors, keen to learn about Þingvellir, are passing through the parliamentary

site.

Motor traffic within the parliamentary site shall be confined to the special needs of those with limited mobility, the tasks of park wardens, and operational needs, except where special events and functions require otherwise.

Zone S5: Hakið

A zone has been allocated on Hakið, for use similar to the present use, allowing for normal expansion in accord with rising numbers of visitors. An interpretive centre and a viewing platform are now located on Hakið. From there a path leads down the Almannagjá gorge and into the parliamentary site.

Limits of acceptable change:

On Hakið, lava formations adjacent to Almannagjá shall be protected from wear, with the small amount of vegetation that thrives there, while otherwise provision is made for man-made structures and roads as necessitated by services to visitors, including those with limited mobility, provided that this is done in harmony with the environment. Structures on Hakið shall not be noticeable from the parliamentary site.

The policy for this zone is as follows:

On Hakið, the principal entrance to the national park shall be located; visitors arrive by road, receive instruction and see an overview of the area, then walk down Almannagjá, which leads them into the network of footpaths. At this principal entrance, visitors will be able to buy books and souvenirs, and refreshments. The man-made structures are to form an entrance which will have a simple and tasteful appearance. For most visitors to pingvellir, this is their first stopping-place, and its appearance must be in accord with that.

Building plots, car parks and driving routes must be planned in accord with necessary future development and reception of large numbers of visitors, e.g. when festivities are held in the park. A local plan has been made for Hakið.

Zone S6: Summer cabin zones

Summer cabins are located in two zones. One extends from Hotel Valhöll to the southwest along Hallurinn to the boundary of the conservation area, while the other, much smaller, is adjacent to Gjábakki, where six cabins are located. These summer cabins have been built on separate sites, which are leased for ten-year periods. The cabins are of various different types, and the vegetation around them is variable, and generally inconsistent with the vegetation of the national park.

Limits of acceptable change:

It is clear that the summer cabin zones have been altered, and are not suitable for conservation in their present form. On the other hand, it shall be ensured that the zones do not become any more inconsistent with their surroundings than is now the case; no further building shall be permitted in these zones, nor enlargement of cabins.

The policy for this zone is as follows:

The policy shall be pursued that when summer cabins are offered for sale the national park shall exercise its pre-emptive right to purchase, and shall take over plots when leases expire; initially, the main emphasis is to be placed upon the Gjábakki zone.

The local plan shall provide for factors such as appearance, vegetation and access, in so far as is necessary in order to safeguard the interests of the national park.

Zone S7: Gjábakki and Arnarfell

Gjábakki is an abandoned farm estate which contributes much to the overall landscape on the eastern edge of the rift valley. The farm buildings have disappeared. This is a popular waystation for horsemen, and the old route between Pingvellir and Skálholt passes through here.

South of Gjábakki is Arnarfell, a hill 239m high, which marks the southeastern border of the national park. It is an interesting area for walkers, which has good views, geological formations and heritage sites all in one place. Considerable soil erosion has taken place in the area.

Limits of acceptable change:

This zone shall not be disrupted more than is already the case. Erosion at Arnarfell shall be halted in consultation with the Soil Conservation Service, after which efforts shall be made to restore the vegetation to its natural condition.

The policy for this zone is as follows:

Gjábakki will be a starting point for walking routes, and a centre for other outdoor activity in the eastern part of the national park, and information on the area shall be placed there.

Paths shall be marked, and people shall be informed about them, so that visitors to the national park have easier access to this part of the park. At Arnarfell new angling areas shall also be promoted. Otherwise, no development is envisaged in the zone.

Below Arnarfell a campsite shall be marked out, with minimum services.

Zone S8: Pingvellir Lake

Pingvellir Lake is one of the most prolific fishing lakes known. The abundance of fish, inexpensive angling permits and easy accessibility from urban areas make the lake an excellent place for outdoor activity in the form of angling, not least for children and youngsters. Public debate, in parliament among other places, reflects the public wish to re-establish fish species which have been lost from the lake. There is also much interest in boating on Pingvellir Lake, which is at present not permissible for the general public. However, there is no reason to suppose that small non-motorised boat traffic at a reasonable distance from the shore would cause any problem.

Limits of acceptable change:

It is important not to disrupt the flora and fauna of the lake beyond what is already the case, and thus care shall be taken that such disruption does not result from developments. Careful monitoring is required to ensure that activities on the lake and within the catchment area do not cause pollution.

The policy for this zone is as follows:

In consultation with the angling association, rules shall be written on angling methods. Also, non-motorised boats will be permitted on the lake within the National Park. A suitable site shall be found for a slipway, where rules on angling, sailing routes and safety rules will be promulgated.

Emphasis shall be placed upon instructing visitors about the ecosystem of the lake in an interesting manner, by inviting them by various means to look beneath the surface.

Efforts shall be made to reach an agreement with Landsvirkjun (National Power Company) on management of water flow and water level, taking account of the needs of the lake's ecosystem, and on re-establishing habitats of fish stocks that have been lost.



Zone S9: Farms

Farms within the national park are Brúsastaðir and Kárastaðir, in the southwest corner of the park. Traditional sheep husbandry is practised at Brúsastaðir, while Kárastaðir is now only a residence, and not a working farm. The buildings are typical of farm buildings. At the western edge of Kárastaðir property is *Vinaskógur* (Friendship Forest), where many visiting dignitaries have planted trees. The Icelandic Forestry Association has care of the forest.

Limits of acceptable change:

Special attention must be paid to the environmental impact of agriculture on the farms, and it must be ensured that activities there do not have any noticeable effect upon the national park in other ways.

The policy for this zone is as follows:

The farms shall continue to be inhabited and farmed as at present, but renewal of leases, e.g. at change of tenant, is subject to the consent of the Þingvellir Commission.

Zone S10: Svartagil and Skógarhólar

Svartagil is a former farmstead leased from the church estate of Þingvellir, now abandoned. Considerable soil erosion has taken place there, and this must be halted in collaboration with the Soil Conservation Service. A gravel pit for construction material is also located there.

At Skógarhólar is a natural plain; a sheep pen built in 1925 stands here, which was formerly used for the autumn round-up by farmers of Þingvellir. Facilities for horsemen are at Skógarhólar, under an agreement between the national park and *Landssamband hestamanna* (Equestrian Federation). The agreement expires in 2005.

Limits of acceptable change:

In this zone, the protection and nurturing of natural vegetation shall be promoted.

The policy for this zone is as follows:

The aim is to continue to quarry material from the gravel pit at Svartagil, but to restrict this to the national park's own needs. Quarrying shall be organised in such a way as to minimise environmental impact, and the gravel pit shall be made to harmonise with the present environment. The same place is to be used for disposal (burying) of organic waste from the national park. These factors are to be dealt with more fully in the local plan, and the zones are to be delimited.

The intention is that the horsemen's waystation at Skógarhólar remain, and that riders will be able to ride in the national park, away from the most-visited locations, on marked bridle paths. The operational criteria of the waystation will be the same as for other similar activities within the national park.

7.3. Local plan

No formal legally-binding local plan exists for the Þingvellir National Park as a whole, and the master plan in preparation for Bláskógabyggð does not specify arrangements within the national park. The management plan for the national park from 1988 has been used as a source. The emphasis of that document is similar to that put forward here.

Local planning ought to be carried out for the entire national park, thus addressing in more detail the principles of planning discussed here. The plan shall include standardised design requirements for all new construction at Þingvellir, and also guidelines for renovation and repair of existing buildings. Building plots need to be defined, along with the locations of paths and roads.



8. ACCESS AND TRAFFIC

8.1. Present situation

Þingvellir is one of Iceland's most-visited tourist attractions; recent surveys show that in summer two-thirds of foreign visitors to Iceland visit Þingvellir, and about half in winter. In 2001, 290,000 people visited Þingvellir, of whom 200,000 were foreign visitors. Many tourists visit Þingvellir and two other major tourist attractions, the Gullfoss waterfall and Geysir geothermal area, in the same trip. During the winter, access to the national park is contingent upon weather and road conditions.

A road for motor vehicles leads from the service centre to the parliamentary site, and onwards along the lake shore to the east. Within the parliamentary site a network of paths has been established, which connects with Hakið via the Almannagjá gorge. In the Þingvellir lava field are various old routes which are still clearly visible, some of which have been improved by surfacing with gravel. Horsemen have access to some of the paths in the lava field.

8.2. Vision for 2024

The Þingvellir National Park is open to all throughout the year, and is much visited by Icelanders, as well as by a large proportion of foreign tourists. Visitor traffic is managed in an active and organised manner in order to ensure that nature, heritage sites and other valued qualities are not subjected to wear exceeding the defined acceptable limits. As they pass through the park visitors receive clear messages on the rules with which they must comply regarding access and traffic. Footpaths and other options for activities are well signposted, and instruction is offered by various means of what may be seen at each location.

Roads for motor vehicles and car parks are adequate for receiving visitors in a safe and effective manner, and emphasis is placed upon a system of footpaths which lead the visitor on foot between the main points of interest. Provision is also made for horseback traffic on certain paths outside the most sensitive and most-visited sites, while provision is also made for cyclists on the principal paths, and for access for those with limited mobility to the principal sites. Motor traffic is mainly excluded from the most sensitive areas such as the parliamentary site, and motor traffic is prohibited on paths and tracks. The road and path system is designed to make as little visual impact as possible, and to ensure quiet and safe flow-through of visitors.

8.3. Principal objectives

The national park and its principal service structures are to be open to visitors all year round. Winter opening is to be in accord with conditions (weather, road conditions), and emphasis is to be placed on promulgating information on the services available at any time.

Within the national park, a well-organised system of safe and well-made paths, which harmonise well with the environment, is to be maintained. The form of each path is to reflect its role, the traffic it is intended to bear, and its importance in the overall plan.

The principal sites within the national park shall be accessible via paths suitable for wheelchairs, in so far as this is practicable.

The national park is to be accessible on the Internet, whereby visitors will be able to enjoy a "virtual" visit to the park, and receive instruction, to some extent as if they were visiting in real life. Visitors, both from Iceland and abroad, can prepare for their visit by learning about Þingvellir on the website.

A local plan shall be approved for the entire national park, which shall state that motor traffic shall not damage the appearance and peace of the national park, while the network of footpaths plays a correspondingly important role. Car parks

shall be located on the margin of sensitive areas, and to a limited degree within them, mainly for those who make a brief visit, and for those with limited mobility.

One of the objectives of the network of paths is to disperse visitors, and thus spread the load through the national park. In order for this to succeed, it is necessary that all paths be well signposted, and that places of interest be clearly indicated.

Provision is to be made for horseback traffic in the planning of the network of paths, to the extent that the policy on land use and conservation allows within each zone. The principle shall be observed, however, that horseback traffic be separated from the areas which are most sensitive, and those where pedestrian traffic is greatest.

8.4. Monitoring

The condition of the network of paths shall be assessed each year, and a plan made for maintenance and new developments. Traffic outside the paths shall be estimated, and an assessment shall be made of whether the paths are sufficient to sustain the traffic they carry.

9. VISITS, ACTIVITIES AND FACILITIES

9.1. Present situation

People visit Pingvellir for a variety of reasons, relating both to nature and to history. The facilities and services offered at the national park reflect this variety.

There are many indications that Pingvellir is growing in popularity for outdoor activities, and facilities in the park are in demand for a variety of outdoor activities; the needs of those involved in these different activities can be difficult to reconcile. The most popular are e.g. horse-riding, boating, angling, bird-watching, diving, cycling, and finally general outdoor life and walking. These leisure activities have a variable impact upon the environment, and no formal approach has yet been developed in order to limit the pressure on the environment where it is excessive, or is approaching the limits of tolerance.

Anglers are keen to gain better access to the lake, and at more locations than at present. Better lavatory facilities are required, and improvement would be desirable in the way visitors treat the site. Demand from different groups may require rules of interaction, which should be developed in consultation with the groups in question. The unique nature of the lake offers various opportunities to make the ecosystem beneath the surface more visible to visitors.

No consistent principle or policy exists with regard to the criteria and general conditions of agreements with businesses and organisations which function within the national park.

The role of the national Lutheran church within the national park has changed in recent years, and the church is of the view that it should play a larger role than at present.

Opinion polls among visitors to the national park, and consultative meetings, indicate that visitors are in favour of improved facilities and catering for those who visit the park, a greater variety of accommodation, and improved access to some sites, e.g. for those with limited mobility. Facilities for receiving large parties also need improvement.

The services provided at Pingvellir vis-à-vis the flow of visitors, and demand for specific types of service, have not been analysed.

9.2. Vision for 2024

Facilities for receiving the different groups who visit Pingvellir National Park are good throughout the year, and aim to provide good access and an enjoyable

experience for visitors, while also ensuring conservation and good treatment of the natural environment and heritage sites. The principle of all development and arrangements in reception of visitors is that the main objective be that visitors be informed about the unique cultural and natural features of Pingvellir.

The atmosphere of Pingvellir is peaceful, with a sense of sanctity, and man-made structures harmonise well with the environment. Within the national park one may enjoy nature, experience history, learn, and engage in outdoor activities, in a vivid and enjoyable manner. Visitors usually leave the national park having learned something new.

Services to visitors which require development, such as hotels, are outside the national park, and park management collaborates fruitfully with tourist businesses nearby.

In development of service, care is taken to utilise the same facilities for multiple uses where possible, but also to minimise the risk of conflicts between different groups.

The objective is to develop services at one or two specified service areas in accord with a local plan, and not to spread services throughout the national park. This is the most economical solution, and causes the least disruption due to installation of transport and utility systems.

All services within the national park are subject to defined quality standards and to official licensing.

9.3. Principal objectives

The national park is to provide campsites as hitherto, while other accommodation is to be outside the national park, urban areas being within an easy distance. The present campsites are to be developed in accord with the general expectations of campers.

Catering services, other services for visitors and lavatories are to be planned specifically on the basis of the flow of visitors in the park, on the principle that services be accessible, but also modest and low-profile.

The business premisses of hotel operations at Valhöll are to be considered, taking account of other services within the park and around it. Finally, a decision is to be made on future arrangements. Facilities are to be provided for conferences and functions held by parliament, the government and others at Valhöll, in addition to which certain guests may be accommodated there.

All facilities to be developed in the national park are to take account of the unique cultural and natural status of Pingvellir, with the objective that visitors leave knowing more than when they arrived.

Individual aspects of the history of Pingvellir are to be put across by visual, dramatised and vivid means.

Facilities at the lake are to be improved, in order to prevent damage to sensitive nature, and making provision for year-round use.

Utilisation, zones, rules of interaction and licensing are to be defined in consultation with all groups of users, e.g. anglers, boaters and kayakers, and divers.

9.4. Monitoring

It is necessary to monitor carefully the impact of visitors on the national park, and to ensure that as many as possible may enjoy a visit to the park without exceeding the limits of acceptable change.

The monitoring entails the following:

- Regular assessment of the condition of sensitive areas, using a checklist

of aspects to be monitored. Comparison of the results of assessment of condition with established criteria.

- If it transpires that the condition is inconsistent with acceptable limits, certain responses shall be determined, generally consisting of a change in facilities in order to handle a heavier load, without affecting or restricting utilisation.

It is necessary to keep records of all assessments, criteria and responses.

10. ECOSYSTEM

10.1. Present situation

Coniferous trees were planted at several locations in the pingvellir National Park during the twentieth century. The first were planted in 1899, and this marked the commencement of coniferous afforestation in Iceland. Such afforestation has now ceased, and the generally-accepted view is that such a major alteration to the ecosystem and appearance of the national park is not justifiable. It has also been pointed out that tree roots can cause damage to nearby archaeological remains. The national park has collaborated with the Forest Service on thinning and care of the coniferous trees in the national park.

The plant ecosystem has been studied and partly charted, but this work has not been completed. Some desertification has taken place in the northernmost sector of the park, especially at Svartagil and Arnarfell.

The national park is affiliated to *Veiðifélag Þingvallavatns* (pingvellir Lake Angling Association) and is a participant, along with other parties, in research and conservation of the lake's ecosystem.

Minks, and to a lesser extent foxes, cause disruption to birdlife, and the national park has applied protective measures against these predators.

10.2. Vision for 2024

The effects of human presence are not to have any further impact on the ecosystems of the pingvellir National Park than is already the case, and this is to be thoroughly ensured in planning and action. Imported species shall be excluded except in the case of changes to the ecosystem on a national scale, and previous interventions have been partially rectified, especially within the parliamentary site, where vegetation is restored to the condition of former centuries, specifically due to the role of the parliamentary site as a historical setting and for the conservation of heritage sites. The national park makes a contribution to the maintenance and restoration of the ecosystem of pingvellir Lake, e.g. by protection of fish breeding sites in the Öxará river. The variety and distribution of species has been researched and charted. Changes to the ecosystem are systematically monitored, and the causes of change are analysed. Emphasis is placed upon publicising those aspects of the ecosystem which are typical for pingvellir, or otherwise unusual.

Fluctuations in the surface level of pingvellir Lake have been reduced in order to protect the habitat of the kuðungableikja (whelk-trout, so-called after its principal prey) and brown trout. By the same token, a route has re-opened for the brown trout to migrate down into the Efra-Sog river, formerly a natural outlet of pingvellir Lake (before the Sog was harnessed to generate hydroelectric power).

10.3. Principal objectives

Detailed distribution maps shall be compiled for vegetation, wild animals and birds.

Vegetation not native to pingvellir is to be removed from the parliamentary site, e.g. coniferous trees and poplars, and also from other locations where such trees

are adjacent to important heritage sites. The care and thinning of coniferous trees in other zones shall have the objective that other vegetation be able to thrive.

Soil erosion is to be prevented by measures which are consistent with the species already in place, and emphasis shall be placed upon not using species not native to the place which spread beyond defined soil reclamation zones.

The areas where visitor traffic could have an impact upon fauna, e.g. birds' nesting sites, shall be identified, and traffic shall be managed in accord with this.

Fox and especially mink shall be controlled, preferably in collaboration with other landowners around the lake.

In collaboration with Landsvirkjun (National Power Company), measures shall be applied to conserve the ecosystem of the lake and to open a route for the brown trout into the Efra-Sog river.

10.4. Monitoring

A detailed plan shall be made on monitoring of the ecosystem at Pingvellir, in collaboration between the national park, higher education institutions, and other agencies concerned with the ecosystem. The role of the monitoring is to provide warning of changes, and to add to knowledge, e.g. of interaction between species.

11. INSTRUCTION

11.1. Present situation

Extensive educational activities now take place at Pingvellir, with the objective of informing the public about the history and nature of Pingvellir. Multimedia material is available at the interpretive centre on the nature and history of Pingvellir, in addition to printed literature, and organised guided tours of the area. In addition, a project is in progress in collaboration with the Iceland University of Education, with the objective of making the pingvellir website a teaching tool for pupils at the middle stage of compulsory education (10-12 years old).

Consultation with visitors and stakeholders indicates that this educational activity is not sufficiently well publicised. There is also considerable interest in educational material being increased further, not least signs and markings within the national park.

At present the instruction is relatively localised, with the emphasis upon the parliamentary site. This entails that there is considerable pressure upon the parliamentary site, and visitors spend a relatively short time there. By offering educational material which directs visitors' interest to other locations, the burden may be to some extent evened out and spread.

Much remains to be done in research and cataloguing of archaeological sites, and hence it is difficult to cover these in educational material. However, such material could, even now, be very important in instruction on cultural history; this would be based upon scholars' hypotheses, until further research produces more solid evidence.

Educational activities within the park must be clarified, and collaboration must be increased with other bodies (Reykjavík Energy, Landsvirkjun (National Power Company), the Archaeological Preservation Agency and the Institute of Natural History) involved in education and research in the region. Collaboration with schools must be promoted, and they must be encouraged to see Pingvellir as a location for teaching in many different subjects.

11.2. Vision for 2024

An organised and constant flow of students visits Pingvellir; before setting off they have done careful homework using the large variety of educational materials – both in print and multimedia – available about Pingvellir, and the subject of

their own visit.

At Pingvellir, visits by students, and other visitors eager to learn, commence at the interpretive centre, where national park staff explain how the booklets, guidance, multimedia material, signs etc. may be used in order to gain knowledge, and link it to the unique surroundings.

At certain places special provision is made for students who wish to examine the organisms of the lake, vegetation on land or birdlife in connection with their studies.

At Pingvellir provision is made for scholars and artists who seek inspiration and study there, and their work is presented there. The national park collaborates with stakeholders regarding facilities and presentations, so that it is easy to organise visits to many different parties on the same trip.

Emphasis is placed upon instruction, e.g. with guides, regarding those factors which are unique to Pingvellir: heritage sites, cultural history, geology and the ecosystem of the lake.

Effective collaboration exists with the important national institutions which have been based at Pingvellir over the centuries – parliament and the national Lutheran church – so that their role in the history of Pingvellir is satisfactorily covered in educational materials. These institutions honour their history at Pingvellir by intertwining their present-day activities to some degree with the work of the national park.

11.3. Principal objectives

The publication of accessible information material for use away from Pingvellir is to be organised and established in collaboration with educational authorities and experts in each field. Emphasis is to be placed upon interactive multimedia material, which may easily be updated.

The interpretive centre and facilities there are to be improved and strengthened, and it is to become the centre of educational activity, setting a standard for all other educational material. The different factors are mutually supportive: accessible information at the interpretive centre, well-signposted landmarks, heritage sites and historical information on site.

Frequent guided tours are to be offered, with guides who are well qualified in the many different fields of scholarship relating to Pingvellir.

Signs are to be designed providing information and guidance. They are to be of good quality and durable with regard to weathering. A small number of simple variants of signs should be designed, so that economies will be achieved in mass production.

Systematic monitoring is required in order to ensure that educational material is available, and that the content is consistent with the highest standards of preparation and presentation. The condition of signs and signposts must be monitored, and maintenance carried out as required.

Discussions are to be initiated with parliament and the national Lutheran church regarding their part in education and work carried out by the national park. A policy is also to be developed regarding participation by other groups connected with the history of Pingvellir, such as the followers of the ancient Norse religion, *Ásatrú*.

12. RESEARCH, SCIENCE AND MONITORING

12.1. Present situation

A number of different parties are involved in research relating to Pingvellir and Pingvellir Lake. Each of these parties works independently, and there is little or no collaboration between them, except to some degree within each individual field of

scholarship. The national park administration has not seen it as part of its role to initiate coordination in these matters, as e.g. only a small part of the lake falls within the national park. The Pingvellir Commission has provided grants to several projects, especially on the ecosystem of Pingvellir Lake; reports on this have been promulgated in books published about the lake.

The regular activities of the national park do not include any specific fostering of scholarly work and research, except where this has been initiated for some special reason, e.g. through *Kristnihátíðarsjóður* (research fund founded in 2000 to mark the millennium of Christianity in Iceland) or on the initiative of individual scholars or bodies. No register has been compiled of all research relating to Pingvellir.

Consultation during the development of this management plan revealed that people were in favour of the national park taking some initiative in this field, e.g. by keeping records of all research and knowledge in one place, and providing access to them. Interest was also expressed in coordinated guidance, which could lead to more knowledge where it is most lacking.

12.2. Vision for 2024

The national park's involvement in research will primarily be indirect, by facilitating the work of researchers, and participating in presentation of findings, e.g. by their inclusion in educational materials. Emphasis is placed upon factors relating to Pingvellir's unique status, with regard to both nature and history. Especial emphasis is placed upon study of archaeological sites, and their contribution to our knowledge of historic development, life and ideas in the past, and the role of Pingvellir as a centre of Icelandic life during the middle ages.

Attention is to be drawn to the role of Pingvellir in Icelandic medieval history, and collaboration initiated with those who are involved in scholarly research on assembly sites in Iceland, and the authorities at such historic sites as Skálholt, Reykholt and Hólar, to name but a few. Importance is attached to all research and its findings being as visible and accessible as possible, to both scholars and the public, provided that this does not compromise the integrity of the sites.

The Internet is an important forum for exchange and promulgation of information on prior research and its findings, which is useful e.g. in the planning of new studies and for an evaluation of the state of knowledge at any time.

12.3. Principal objectives

A system of collecting and disseminating information on research, researchers and their findings shall be established. Initially, a relatively simple information system is to be established on the Internet. Means must be found of ensuring that information on research is received from the researchers.

In the preparation of educational plans, account shall be taken of research findings, and these findings shall be presented to national park visitors as possible, and as occasions arise.

13. ECONOMY AND COMMUNITY

13.1. Present situation

The national park consults with many bodies and parties connected to the park's work. These are primarily public bodies in the fields of archaeology, forestry, soil reclamation and other such matters subject to public administration, in addition to bodies in local and national government. In general, one may say that this consultation takes place as required, in order to resolve matters that arise in the work of the national park. There has been little consultation with other bodies connected with the national park, e.g. power companies and various public associations.

The location the national park is adjacent to the capital city (30 mins. by road),

and to urban centres in south Iceland, yet it is away from all major transport routes, and there is no urban development in its immediate vicinity. For this reason, there has been minimal development of services on the borders of the park.

The economic effects of the national park must thus be seen as a inseparable part of growth and profitability in Icelandic tourism in general, the national park being one of the most-visited tourist attractions in the country.

Within the national park itself various potential exists for producing revenue from visitors, which have hitherto remained unexplored.

13.2. Vision for 2024

The Pingvellir National Park takes the initiative in cultivating relations with many parties and bodies connected to the park, through active and organised consultation. Thus efforts are made to avoid conflicts of interest, and synergistic effects are hoped for through the involvement of different bodies.

The national park seeks collaboration and consultation with organisations and institutions connected to the history of Pingvellir, primarily parliament and the national Lutheran church.

The national park consults with local authorities adjacent to the park, on matters where their interests may overlap, e.g. planning issues.

The national park issues rules for leisure activities such as diving, angling and horse-riding, in consultation with relevant associations, and seeks to provide for such activities, with the emphasis on spreading the load, so that minimal permanent effects result.

The national park consults with large companies located in the vicinity of the national park, e.g. power companies, with regard to common interests such as the organisation of publicity and research, flow of visitors and distribution systems.

Business within the national park is in principle run by the national park itself, or under contract with the pingvellir Commission in those fields where experience has been gained of contracting out specified services to private businesses, e.g. catering, which the national park would otherwise clearly have to undertake itself.

The pingvellir Commission governs national park operations. The Commission can, by contract, entrust private businesses with parts of its operation while ensuring that such services are rendered with the respect pingvellir is due. All activities are consistent with objectives on conservation, sustainability and respect for the sanctity of pingvellir in people's consciousness. The national park will give adequate notice of all changes which affect those whose livelihood is based upon the national park or visitors to the park, and will seek to mitigate the effects of such changes.

13.3. Principal objectives

A plan for organised consultation with the above-mentioned parties, guided by the principles of coordination and synergy.

The national park will carry out regular surveys of visitors' views on service and their experience of the park, e.g. in connection with the preparation of each operational plan.

14. HERITAGE SITES AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

14.1. Present situation

No complete register exists of all known heritage sites in the pingvellir National

Park, with their locations, dimensions and description. It is possible that some heritage sites may be at risk, e.g. due to erosion by the Öxará river, and other remains may be affected by subsidence adjacent to the lake. Limited excavations have taken place at various locations, with variable results. Heritage sites are found in many parts of the park, but mostly within the parliamentary site and at abandoned farm sites in the lava field.

The Archaeological Preservation Agency deals with applications and grants permits for all archaeological excavations at Pingvellir, and at other places in Iceland, in accord with legislation. The agency emphasises the fact that the archaeological remains at Pingvellir may be the most remarkable in the country, and hence that great care must be taken.

Many of the archaeological remains are clearly visible on the surface, under a layer of soil and vegetation. It is important that such remains not be overwhelmed by vegetation, and that the vegetation not have such root systems as to damage the archaeological remains or hinder study of them. This means that it is necessary to some extent to restrict or eliminate vegetation.

Funding for archaeological research at Pingvellir has been of various kinds, e.g. from the Pingvellir Commission, the National Museum of Iceland and *Kristnihátíðarsjóður* (research fund founded in 2000 to mark the millennium of Christianity in Iceland). No clear policy has existed on the prioritisation of such studies, and there is no clear frame of reference with regard to procedures.

It is necessary to monitor the condition of heritage sites, especially those which are above ground, e.g. stone walls which may suffer weathering or other damage, for instance due to encroachment by visitors.

14.2. Vision for 2024

In the work of the national park, emphasis is placed upon no harm being caused to heritage sites, access to them, and research in the present and future. The role of the national park is primarily to provide for activities by other bodies, which carry out and manage archaeological research in the area, but also to coordinate such work with other activities in the national park. In its day-to-day work the national park is responsible for care and monitoring of the archaeological sites in consultation with the Archaeological Preservation Agency, and it intervenes if encroachment by visitors, vegetation, weathering or similar factors appear likely to have an impact. The prerequisite for organised conservation and care is the detailed cataloguing of the archaeological sites.

Within the area of archaeological remains, visible traces shall be indicated in clear but modest manner, while more information is given on the archaeological sites in the interpretive centre, e.g. through virtual-reality media. Visitors will here have the opportunity to learn about what is known of structures, parliamentary practice and the society of that time, with reference to other subjects such as geology, ecology and philosophy. The surroundings of the heritage sites shall invariably embody respect for their sanctity.

14.3. Principal objectives

Detailed cataloguing of all heritage sites within the national park, together with an evolution of their condition and the need for maintenance and monitoring. Prioritisation of measures to conserve heritage sites which may be at risk.

Clear but modest signs to mark heritage sites, in connection with footpaths within the heritage area. The signs shall also refer to further information available at the interpretive centre or elsewhere.

Footpaths planned in the archaeological area so that visitors can observe the archaeological sites without impact upon them, e.g. by encroachment on them.

Clear criteria for methods in archaeological research with regard to equipment, transfer of soil and similar factors, in addition to an obligation upon the party



carrying out the research to provide information on timing, extent, and impact upon other activities.

Schedule for monitoring and maintenance of heritage sites and areas in collaboration with the Archaeological Preservation Agency. Plan for protective measures if heritage sites are deemed to be at risk. Standards for appearance of archaeological areas, e.g. with regard to vegetation cover and adjacent structures.

15. ADMINISTRATION

15.1. Present situation

The Pingvellir National Park is governed by the Pingvellir Commission, which comprises members of parliament, who are elected to the commission by parliament. The Commission appoints a director of the national park, who is also its CEO. The work of the park comprises two main fields, wardenship of the park and education. In 2003 staff of the national park numbered 7.8 (full-time equivalent), including four permanent posts. The national park receives funding of ISK 70.6 million from the A section of the Budget in 2004, and it has further revenues of about ISK 12.4 million. It thus has about ISK 83 million at its disposal for 2004. In recent years, the diversity of work undertaken by staff has increased greatly, and hence many parties are called upon for their expertise.

The inner administration of the national park is well organised, but is not subject to any formal systems such as quality control systems.

15.2. Vision for 2024

The aim of management of the national park is that as many people as possible should be able to enjoy what the national park has to offer, without affecting its quality. Emphasis is placed upon visitors enjoying the park in diverse ways, and restrictive management is applied only where it clearly serves the interests of conservation in accord with this management plan. Efforts are made to offer visitors the opportunity to enjoy the national park to some extent at all times of year, as conditions permit.

The safety of national park visitors and staff is ensured by clear rules and guidance. Within the national park an organised quality-control system is applied, which ensures that maintenance and other regular tasks are well organised and that there is a response to the unexpected.

Admission to the national park is free of charge to all. Visitors must pay for specific services which they use, e.g. participation in organised activities, angling permits, camping etc. In addition to being a source of revenue, these fees are used as a means of managing the burden on nature caused by these services. Efforts are made to spread the load of such services as far as possible. Services relating to the educational work of the national park are generally free of charge. An important factor in funding of educational projects within the park is sponsorship by private business.

Private business activity within the national park, e.g. catering, is subject to a clear frame of reference to maintain a natural and eco-friendly appearance, with respect for the dignity of the place. Such services are located in accord with policy on land use, and generally at a reasonable distance from the parliamentary site.

The park administration shall make provision for the work of volunteers, from both Iceland and abroad, e.g. by providing clear project descriptions and accommodation for volunteers.

15.3. Principal objectives

A well-defined system is to be introduced in the spirit of environmental management, which links the limits of acceptable change for the various factors

with the carrying capacity of visitors passing through and spending time in the park. The system is to make provision for monitoring, and for intervention in cases where changes exceed acceptable limits. More detailed definitions shall be made of the limits of acceptable change which are here specified for each zone, as applicable.

A quality-control system shall be introduced for the internal administration of the national park, in accord with the scope of its activities, including e.g. maintenance of man-made structures.

Risks which may be posed to staff and visitors in the national park shall be evaluated, and safety rules and plans shall be drawn up in collaboration with administrative bodies concerned with public safety. Safety rules shall be promulgated to visitors in specific locations as necessary, and facilities shall be of high quality and well maintained. The legal status of the national park shall be explored with regard to possible liability for visitors' safety.

Rules shall be drawn up on sponsorship of national park projects by private business, specifying e.g. how the sponsor's contribution is to be credited, what projects are suitable for sponsorship, and other factors regarding the interests of both parties, but with the emphasis on the national park's dignity. A decision shall also be made on policy regarding requests for use of the national park for special commercial purposes, e.g. as a location for films or advertisements.

A frame of reference is to be developed regarding tenders, licensing and private business within the national park. This frame of reference is to ensure that the business is in accord with the overall policy of the national park regarding appearance, conservation and dignity.

A forecast of visitor numbers for the next ten years shall be available at all times, as a reference for decision-making and prioritisation.

16. PRIORITISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF PROJECTS

In the principal objectives put forward for the different fields discussed above, several factors may be identified which form a basis for organised development in accord with this management plan. The factors, which are listed again below, will be reflected in an operational plan put forward in connection with the management plan.

- A formal local plan must be made in accord with the law, which will further develop certain factors connected to planning discussed here.
- A monitoring plan should be made, with the objective of revealing in a systematic manner where encroachment by visitors causes changes that exceed acceptable limits. The plan should also provide for responses in such cases.
- The completion of mapping and cataloguing of heritage sites should be encouraged. The results of this work will be useful in the making of a local plan, and in identifying those sites which may be at risk and require protective measures.
- A clear policy should be formed regarding sponsorship as a source of funding, in order that it may be of use as soon as possible in internal development within the national park.
- Regular consultation should be organised with many stakeholders connected to the national park, for consultancy and reference.
- Improvements are required in promulgation of information and signposting.

All the above-mentioned tasks may reasonably be expected to be completed within the term of the first operational plan.

17. REVIEW AND EVALUATION

The Pingvellir Commission submits to parliament for each electoral term a report on the status and progress of affairs of the national park, for the information of parliament and the general public.

During the twenty-year period of the management plan, provision is made for four operational plans, each for a period of five years. It would be normal, at the end of each operational-plan period, when a new operational plan takes effect, for stock to be taken of the success of the operational plan, and of how the management plan meets the requirements of the time. It is to be expected that over a period of twenty years various external factors, beyond the control of the national park, may change, and this may have an impact upon the management plan, and on the prioritisation based upon it.

Criteria to be applied in review of results are based upon the guiding principles of this management plan.

Criterion no. 1 consists in an answer to the following question: *"Has the special value of the national park been successfully safeguarded, so that the potential for equivalent use has been ensured for the future?"*

If there are any indications to the contrary, a response is necessary, possibly by restricting use.

The answer to the question is derived from the following data:

- Records of the results of systematic monitoring.
- Evaluation by staff, scholars, and others familiar with the national park.
- Results of opinion poll on visitors' evaluation.

Criterion no. 2 consists in the answer to the following question: *"Have visitors to the national park had the opportunity to enjoy its unique character and learn about it, in an accessible manner?"*

The answer may lie in ideas of change to the reception of visitors, and how operational funds are best spent for that purpose.

The answer to the question is based principally upon the following data:

- Records of findings of quality and safety monitoring.
- Findings of opinion polls on quality of service and educational material.
- Statistics on visitor numbers, use of services, duration of stay, operational results, etc.

Gathering of data for review and assessment of results is thus primarily as follows:

- Systematic recording of data on the status of various factors (environmental monitoring, quality, safety, etc.). Such record-keeping should be governed by clear guidelines, and the recording of data is to be continuous in accord with the nature of the subject.
- Opinion polls of visitors to be repeated during the preparation of each new operational plan. The poll is to cover diverse factors concerned with the visitor's evaluation of his/her experience and the quality of the service.
- Consultation with stakeholders which is organised and recorded, e.g. by annual meetings.

Evaluation of results is a prerequisite for good planning, and it may lead to revision of the management plan itself. If the management plan is amended, stakeholders must be informed of these amendments.



ANNEX A: PROCEDURES IN MANAGEMENT PLANNING

This management plan and vision for the Pingvellir National Park is the fruit of work by many different people and agencies, which commenced in the summer of 2003. Guðrún Kristinsdóttir, head warden at Pingvellir, has supervised the work on behalf of the Pingvellir National Park, while national park director Sigurður K. Oddsson and interpretive manager Einar Á. E. Sæmundsen also took part in the process, together with the Pingvellir Commission.

The project was carried out by the Alta consulting company, under the management of Halldóra Hreggviðsdóttir, and the management plan was edited by Árni Geirsson. Other members of Alta staff also contributed, mainly with regard to stakeholder consultation and processing of findings.

In this project, the emphasis has been on ensuring that policy on the management of the national park is in keeping with the wishes of its owners, the people of Iceland. Thus priority was given to consultation with visitors and stakeholders.

Work commenced in the summer of 2003, with an opinion poll of visitors to the national park. They were asked about e.g. their attitude to the national park, the services provided there, and what qualities of the national park had most significance for them. Several consultative meetings were also held with stakeholders, in order to explore their views on conservation and utilisation of the national park. A total of 78 businesses, agencies and organisations were invited to send a representative to consultative meetings with regard to management planning, and over 100 representative attended such meetings with members of the planning group. Following the consultative meetings, the ideas which had emerged were explored further, and were applied directly to the management planning. In addition to the opinion poll and consultative meetings, use was made of many existing books on Pingvellir, the document prepared for the nomination of Pingvellir to the UNESCO World Heritage List, and the findings of a consultative meeting held in connection with the nomination.

The work was carried out in accord with guidance from leaders in management planning for nations parks and other conservation areas, such as experts Adrian Phillips and Henry Cleere, who visited Iceland on behalf of UNESCO in connection with the nomination of Pingvellir to the World Heritage List, and also guidelines from the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS).

This document was translated into English by Anna Yates.

List of stakeholders invited to consultative meetings in connection with management planning.

The following stakeholders were invited to consultative meetings in connection with management planning:

- Andri Snær Magnússon, novelist
- Archaeological Preservation Agency
- Ármenn Angling Association
- Árnessýsla rural areas planning officer
- Árnessýsla rural areas tourism officer
- Árni Magnússon Institute
- Ásatrúarfélagið [followers of the Old Norse religion]
- Association of Icelandic Anglers
- Bjarni Harðarson, journalist
- Bláskógabyggð municipality
- Catering service, Pingvellir service centre
- Dalsel guesthouse
- Deanery of Árnes
- Destination Iceland
- Environment and Food Agency
- Gamla-Borg café
- Geysir tourist services
- Grímsnes- og Grafningshreppur municipality
- Guðmundur Tyrfingsson bus company
- Hamrahlíð High School
- Highlander
- Hólar College
- Hótel Valhöll
- Hvanneyri Agricultural College environmental planning department
- Iceland Environmental Consultancy
- Iceland Excursions - Allrahanda
- Iceland School for Tourist Guides
- Iceland Touring Club
- Iceland Tourist Board
- Iceland Travel [Icelandair subsidiary]
- Iceland University of Education
- Icelandic Association of Driver/Tourist Guides
- Icelandic Cyclists' Federation
- Icelandic Forestry Association
- Icelandic Forestry Service
- Icelandic Kayak Club
- Icelandic Mountain Bike Club
- Icelandic Natural History Society
- Icelandic Society for the Protection of Birds
- Icelandic Tourist Guide Association
- Icelandic Travel Horses
- Icelandic Travel Industry Association



- Institute of Freshwater Fisheries
- Institute of Natural History
- Kópavogur Natural History Museum
- Landssamband hestamannafélaga [Equestrian Federation]
- Landsvirkjun [National Power Company]
- Landvernd – National Association for the Protection of the Icelandic Environment
- Laxfiskar, fish biology research
- Ministry of Communications
- Ministry of Education and Culture
- National Church of Iceland – Bishop’s Office
- National Energy Authority
- National Museum of Iceland
- Nesbúð tourist services
- Páll Valsson, historian
- Parliament: information and technology department
- Placenames Institute
- Prime Minister’s Office
- Rangers’ Association of Iceland
- Reykjavík angling Association
- Reykjavík Complete [City of Reykjavík]
- Reykjavík Education Service Centre
- Reykjavík Energy
- Reykjavík Excursions
- Reykjavík Museum - Árbæjarsafn
- Róbert Haraldsson, philosopher
- Saga og miðlun, cultural tourism
- Sigrún Helgadóttir, biologist
- Skálholtsskóli (church cultural and educational centre)
- Soil Conservation Service of Iceland
- South Iceland Tourist Information
- Sport Diving Club
- Storyworks
- Sumarliði Ísleifsson, historian
- Sveinn Einarsson, Ministry of Education and Culture
- Þingvellir Lake Angling Association
- Tourism Research and Consultancy
- Tourism School, Kópavogur High School
- Útivist travel club
- Vestfjarðaleið Travel



ANNEX B: MAPS

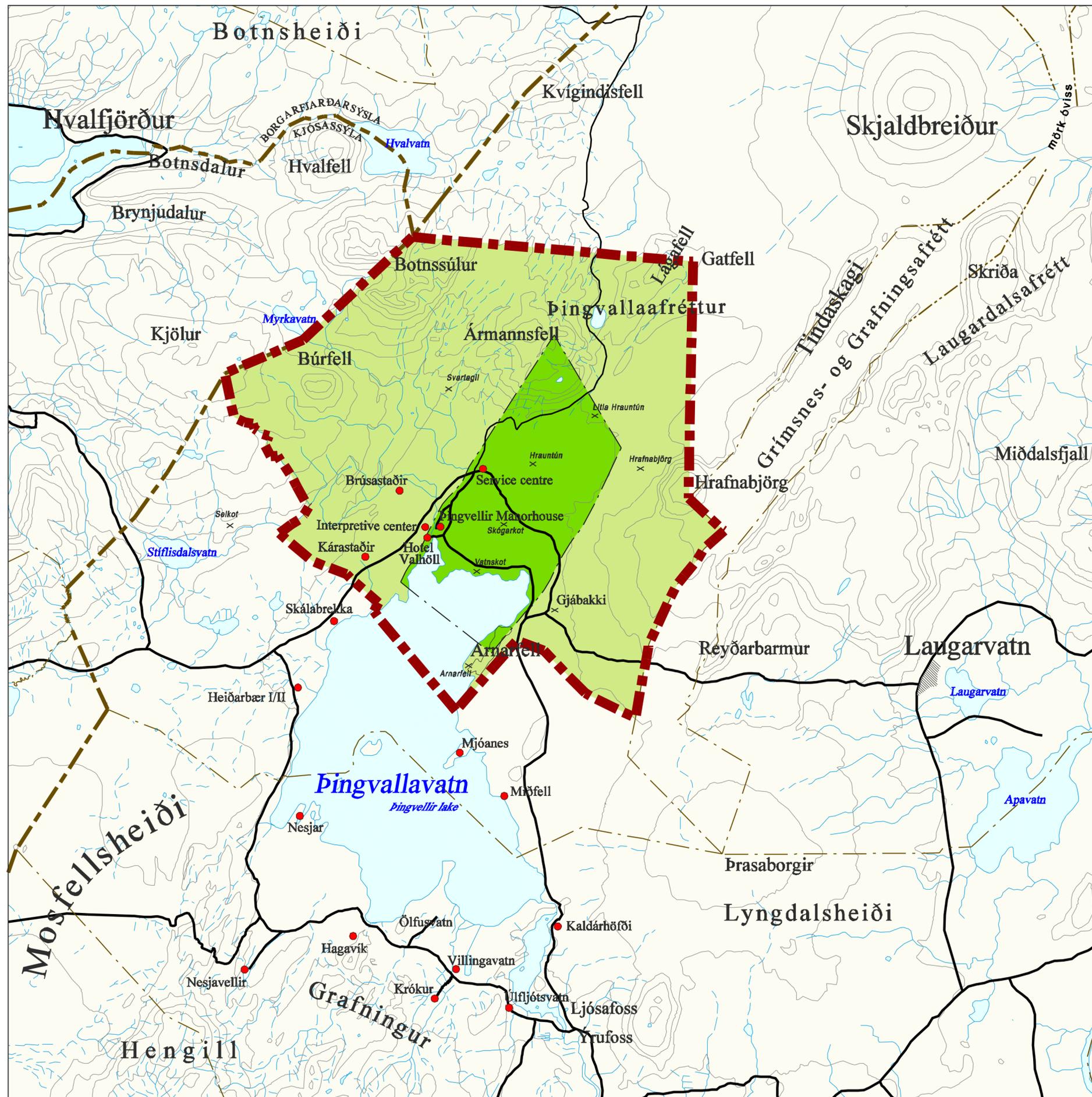
This annex contains two maps:

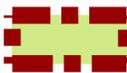
Map 1: Boundaries of national park

Map 2: Zoning

ÞINGVELLIR NATIONAL PARK

Map 1: Park boundaries



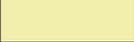
-  Þingvellir national park, a protected national shrine for all Icelanders, by law from 1928
-  New boundaries; Þingvellir, national park, a protected national shrine for all Icelanders, by law from 2004
-  County boundaries
-  Municipal boundaries
-  Farm / building
-  Abandoned farmstead / ruin
-  Road
-  100 m contour



ÞINGVELLIR NATIONAL PARK

Map 2: Zoning



-  National park boundaries
-  S1: Þingvellir lava field and other leisure areas
-  S2: Leirar
-  S3: Lakeshore
-  S4: Parliamentary site
-  S5: Hakið
-  S6: Summer cabin zones
-  S7: Gjábackki and Arnarfell
-  S8: Þingvallavatr (Þingvellir lake)
-  S9: Farms
-  S10: Svartagil and Skógarhólar
-  Farm / building
-  Abandoned farmstead / ruin
-  Road
-  Secondary road
-  Bridle path and foothpath
-  Footpath

