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STEERING COMMITTEE FOR THE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT
OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL HABITATS

Group of Specialists on Protected Areas
(PE-S-ZP)

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Swiss National Park (Switzerland)

Renewal of the European Diploma

Expert's report
by
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1. The European Diploma was first awarded to the Swiss National Park in 1967, in category A. It was last renewed on 25 June 1987.
2. The Secretariat did not accompany the expert when he visited the park.
3. Appendix I features Resolution (87)6 adopted when the Diploma was last renewed. In appendix II the Secretariat submits a draft resolution for possible renewal in 1992.

1. GENERAL INFORMATION

The Swiss National Park was created by a Federal decree of 25 March 1914. Its initial surface area was 13,800 hectares.

At the request of the Swiss Confederation, the European Diploma, category A, was awarded to the park on 27 October 1967 and has since been renewed every 5 years, namely in 1972, 1977, 1982 and 1987.

As renewal of the diploma for a further 5-year period is due to be considered, the Directorate of Environment and Local Authorities of the Council of Europe has entrusted me with carrying out an on-the-spot appraisal, with instructions to check compliance with Resolution (87)6, which contained the following recommendations:

1. - that the hunting season for large game be determined according to meteorological and ecological conditions (thereby contributing to a reduction in the red deer population);

2. - that contacts be established with the management of the Stelvio National Park, for the purpose of establishing an agreed protection policy;

3. - that a post of Deputy Director be established, in order to ensure continuity of management.

2. REPORT ON THE VISIT

I visited the park on 25 and 26 July 1991. As no representative of the Directorate of Environment and Local Authorities had been designated to accompany me, I went to ZERNEZ alone.

I was welcomed by the park's new director, Mr Klaus ROBIN and by MM Martin BOESCH and Nicolin BISCHHOFF, both members of the Swiss National Park Committee. Mr Boesch is a representative of the Nature Conservation Federation and a member of the research sub-committee; Mr Bischoff is a retired forestry engineer, botanist and historiographer specialising in human intervention in the park.

The weather was good on the whole, although a violent storm forced us to cut short the first day's visit.

The park's director himself acted as my guide throughout the two days and I was given free access to all the sites which I felt able to visit in such a short space of time.

I would like to thank all those who helped me in my work, and particularly Mr ROBIN.

3. MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SITE

Located in ENGADINE, abutting the Italian border for 19 km, the Swiss National Park currently covers a surface area of 16,800 hectares. It consists of former pastures, forest and rocky massifs. The park is uninhabited, with the exception of an enclave consisting of the Ilfuorn hotel and its farming concern. This area has never in fact formed part of the park.

Only one road goes through the park, namely the Ofenpass road from ZERNEZ to MUSTAIR.

Altitude varies from 1,500 to 3174 metres (Piz Pisoc).

Geology: Consisting mainly of crumbly dolomite limestone, the park also comprises outcrops of schist, gneiss and sandstone in the Val Trupchun and the Munt la Scherra.

Climate: The number of hours of sunshine is exceptional and rainfall low: the park has continental climate.

Flora: The flora is surprisingly varied and comprises approximately 650 species, some of which are at record altitudes.

Fauna:

Mammals: We will restrict ourselves here to the most important species.
Red deer and roe deer for the deer tribe.
Chamois and ibex for cavicorns
Marmots for rodents

Birds: The golden eagle, the jackdaw and the nut-cracker, which is the park's logo.

See the presentation report for further details on the rest of the fauna.

4. ADMINISTRATIVE SITUATION OF THE PARK

The park is owned by the municipalities of S-CHANZ, ZERNEZ, SCUOL and VALCHAVA, and is managed by a committee whose membership was laid down by article 4 of the law of 19 December 1980, which came into force on 15 April 1981.

The municipalities which own the park signed an indefinite lease on their land with the Swiss Confederation. This lease may only be terminated by the Federal Assembly, although its decision is subject to a referendum.

The Commission endorses responsibility for managing the park.

One of the specific features of this law is the judicious attribution of a certain number of prerogatives to federal and local bodies respectively.

5. SUBJECTS EXAMINED DURING THE APPRAISAL

During a meeting lasting several hours with the above-mentioned officials, at the park centre, we decided on the programme of the visit and the circuits to be followed, and raised the specific problems which should be dealt with.

I asked to visit one of the sites worst affected by erosion resulting from the thousands of visitors, namely the STABELCHOD, and VAL TRUPCHUN, where the problem of pressure from large wild ungulates is particularly in evidence and, finally, the park centre, which plays a crucial role in welcoming, informing and educating the public.

STABELCHOD:

The path which leads from car park no. 8 located by the Ofenpass road crosses through the former Stabelchod pasture before joining the circuit from Val dal Botsch to Val Minger. Along this route erosion is substantial due to the constant flow of visitors. It is mainly concentrated in two particular areas:

- in slightly sloping areas where stagnant damp patches mean that visitors look for dryer ways through, which eventually leads to the creation of a number of parallel paths;
- areas with rocky edges where walkers seek other solutions for reasons of comfort.

Each of these passages requires special treatment.

The problem of damp will be solved by constructing efficient ditches designed for rapid drainage and also by remetalling the path where required so that it can be used permanently.

The problem of rocky areas can only be resolved by resurfacing the rocks or, which would appear to be more appropriate, by finding other paths.

Removing some of the causes should improve the situation on condition that everything is done to ensure that visitors are obliged to take the restored paths, thus preserving the rest.

NB: When analysing the park's economic impact on the region, it becomes clear that it will be difficult to reduce the number of visitors. Accordingly, measures should be taken to welcome them without damaging the park too much. We will return to this subject later.

VAL TRUPCHUN:

We left S-CHANF and followed the Ova da Varusch valley as far as the Trupchun refuge.

From the confluence of the Ova da Trupschun with the Ova da Muschauns onwards pressure from large ungulates is clearly visible. From one end of the path to the other virtually no tree appeared to be undamaged by the attack of the ibex and, in some cases, the red deer.

This is demonstrated by wool hanging from the bark of the large trees or by the stripping and systematic destruction of young trees. This is true to such an extent that at present the forest is no longer regenerating naturally, particularly since the above is in addition to a variety of damage caused by insects and fungi.

The following can be observed without great difficulty:

- brown-felt blight of conifers (*herpotrichia nigra*), which mainly harms the lower branches and young trees, and can be fatal to the latter;
- spruce needle rust (*chrysomixa rhododendri*), a disease linked to temperature and dampness which mainly attacks young trees, inflicting substantial defoliation;
- finally, cyclical attacks by *zeraphera dianiana*, entailing substantial defoliation.

One does not need to be especially observant to notice a considerable number of ibex perpetually on the move, constantly attacking the flexible trunks of the young larches. I was able to observe at leisure the behaviour of approximately 50 ibex over a fairly limited area.

In contrast to what one might think, it is the red deer which occupy the upper part of the park's pasture land during the summer. Herds of several dozen animals occupy the alpine meadows above the shrub line. It is only due to the favourable weather conditions that vegetation resists over-grazing in places.

Damage resulting from rubbing, which is particularly in evidence during the rutting season, when stags mark out their territory, but also when red deer shed their first set of antlers, is in addition to the effects of feeding, grazing, stripping of trees and browsing.

In other words, young trees are under terrible pressure.

The forest has ceased regenerating in places.

Even though nothing is visible to the untrained eye, it is undeniable that in the long term the forest will shrink and then disappear altogether.

By constantly moving around, large ungulates have created a dense network of tracks, which divide the alpine meadow into distinct patches of grass. This damage is comparable in all respects to that inflicted by domestic animals before the park was created.

The causes of the numerous landslides are to be found in this major damage to the park's vegetation.

Resolution (87)6 recommended that the hunting season be determined according to meteorological and ecological conditions with a view to reducing the red deer population. This was implemented and an additional measure even enables the park's wardens to take part in this work. The red deer population appears to have stabilised at around 2,000 head, but the ibex population is rising sharply. The park's managers are aware of this. A study, which should define seasonal population movements is currently being carried out, and will reveal the practical measures required to maintain the livestock at a threshold compatible with the park's equilibrium.

The chamois population declined in recent years when it was hit by contagious conjunctivitis. With the help of the park's wardens the virus was brought under control. Today the livestock is healthy, but its space is being heavily encroached upon by the two other ruminants mentioned above.

In certain areas the ibex seems to be on the way to becoming the undisputed master of the territory, especially in view of the fact that its tame disposition enables it to occupy areas which are heavily frequented by humans.

THE PARK CENTRE:

In view of the major tourist development carried out by the municipalities neighbouring the park, the publicity which surrounded the 75th anniversary of the park's foundation and, finally, the growing public enthusiasm for a return to nature, we can expect to see an increase in the number of visitors to this region.

The park centre, which was built several years ago, plays a fundamental role in channelling visitors but also helps to occupy them during part of their stay in ZERNEZ or the region. In hot weather and on peak visiting days space is too limited.

Accordingly, the whole concept of the centre should be rethought and, if appropriate, an extension built.

Under no circumstances can the need to minimise the impact of visitors on the park itself be met simply by imposing restrictions. Parks are the most valuable resource in developing public awareness of the need for nature conservation, and we cannot afford to deprive ourselves of this weapon. Consequently, a certain number of measures must be taken to preserve this resource, such as the development of a buffer or peripheral zone in which visitors can move more freely. The possibility of developing complementary leisure facilities such as vision parks may also be envisaged.

CONCLUSION:

At present, no major factor undermines the validity of the category A Diploma awarded to the Swiss National Park in 1987.

It is always pleasing to reach this conclusion.

The sole negative point is that Recommendations 2 and 3 of Resolution (87) 6 have not been carried out in full: a post of deputy director has not yet been established, and it should be remembered that the new director took up his post more than one year ago.

Contact was established with the neighbouring STELVIO National Park as part of the international programme for reintroducing the bearded vulture. It is regrettable that the two directors have not yet had an opportunity to meet. Perhaps the Council of Europe could organise this meeting?

DRAFT RESOLUTION:

1. Creation of a post of deputy director by 1993 at the latest.
2. Undertake major work without delay on both the park centre itself and the surrounding area in order to welcome an increasing number of visitors.
3. Intensify research on the ibex so that all the information needed for a decision is available as soon as possible. Consequently, co-ordinate research with a view to focusing, as appropriate, on the park's immediate requirements.

APPENDIX I

COUNCIL OF EUROPE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

RESOLUTION (87) 6

ON THE RENEWAL OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA AWARDED TO THE SWISS NATIONAL PARK

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 25 June 1987
at the 409th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.a of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Having regard to Resolution (65) 6 instituting the European Diploma;

Having regard to Resolution (67) 23 awarding the European Diploma to the Swiss National Park;

Having regard to the proposals of the Steering Committee for the Conservation and Management of the Environment and Natural Habitats (CDPE),

Renews the European Diploma, category A, awarded to the Swiss National Park, until 26 October 1992, subject to the following recommendations:

- that the hunting season for large game be determined according to meteorological and ecological conditions (thereby contributing to a reduction in the red deer population);
- that contact be established with the management of the Stelvio National Park, for the purpose of establishing an agreed protection policy;
- that a post of Deputy Director be established, in order to ensure continuity of management.

APPENDIX II

Draft Resolution (92) ...

ON THE RENEWAL OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA
AWARDED TO THE SWISS NATIONAL PARK

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15a of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Having regard to Resolution (65) 6 instituting the European Diploma;

Having regard to Resolution (67) 23 awarding the European Diploma to the Swiss National Park;

Having regard to the proposals of the Steering Committee for the conservation and management of the environment and natural habitats (CDPE);

Renews the European Diploma, awarded to the Swiss National Park in Category A until 1997;

Attaches to the renewal the following recommendations:

1. Creation of a post of deputy director by 1993 at the latest;
2. That major work be undertaken without delay on both the park centre itself and the surrounding area in order to welcome an increasing number of visitors;
3. That research on the ibex be intensified so that all the information needed for a decision is available as soon as possible. Consequently, co-ordinate research with a view to focusing, as appropriate, on the park's immediate requirements.