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**COMMITTEE FOR THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE
IN THE FIELD OF BIOLOGICAL AND LANDSCAPE DIVERSITY**

CO-DBP

Group of specialists - European Diploma

Mercantour National Park

(France)

Category A

RENEWAL

Expertise report
Mr Alfred FROMENT
(Belgium)

The Secretariat did not accompany the expert during his visit to the park.

Resolution (93) 21, awarding the European Diploma, is reproduced in Appendix I; in Appendix II, the Secretariat presents a draft resolution for possible renewal in 1998.

1. INTRODUCTION

As the European Diploma awarded to the Mercantour National Park (PNM) is due to expire on 3 May 1998, an expert appraisal to examine whether it should be renewed was carried out, in conformity with current regulations.

This appraisal took place on 2 and 3 September 1997.

The expert was accompanied throughout his visit by Ms M-O. GUTH, Director, and Mr G. LANDRIEU, new Deputy Director.

The expert was satisfied with the open and constructive nature of the discussions during his two-day visit.

The trade union delegation (MM J.-M. CULOTTA and C. JOULOT) was interviewed at the expert's request, mainly concerning the management problem posed by the return of the wolf. The expert also discussed this subject with Ms FL. ENGLEBERT, from the French Federation for Nature and environmental conservation (France Nature-Environment) FNE).

2. PROGRAMME

Monday 2 September

Morning:

Visit to the new developments at the col de la Cayolle

Accompanied by Ms GUTH, Mr LANDRIEU, Mr BAUDIN, Mayor of Entraunes and President of the Alpes Maritimes hunters' association, Mr R. ESTACHI, head of the Ubaye sector and MM J-P. MANDINE, G. LOMBARD and C. JOULOT, wardens.

At an altitude of 2326 m, the col de la Cayolle is a transitional pass between alpine valleys which has retained its original character as an open crossing-point, unaffected by man-made constructions.

However, the uncontrolled number of tourists and the multitude of signposts have led the park's management to study and develop the col, its surroundings and approaches in order to restore its total tranquillity.

Local stone has been used to narrow the extra wide bends in the roads through the col. This serves as a base for the restoration of the foot of the slopes, where fertile soil is being reintroduced and where the revitalised grass makes it easier to begin turfing.

The work, intentionally simple but requiring a great deal of delicate attention, has been carried entirely by a local firm and by the National Forestry Authority (ONF); the National Park has installed a new information system which blends harmoniously with the site and the new developments, while showing visitors the distinctive features of this route through the replanted forests of the *Grandes Alpes* and the natural characteristics of neighbouring communes.

Finally, the signposts erected in the col have been taken down or moved, leaving only the traditional sign marking the site, thus restoring its original appearance.

On the approach road into the col, work to develop the sources of the Var has mainly consisted of reinforcing the lower part of the embankment with blocks of stone and restoring the end part of a small moraine that been disfigured by avalanches and excessive quarrying. A footpath has been laid out to connect the duckboards alongside the stream right to the source. The slopes, embankments and oxbows on both sides of the road have been re-turfed and re-planted with local species. Existing parking areas have been re-measured and marked off with wooden barriers.

Small, well-integrated parking areas have been provided on each side of the col.

There are plans to re-organise the la Cantonnière and Bayasse hostels (with park information points).

It is also planned to construct a kind of gateway in the village of Bayasse, which marks the northern entrance to the PNM, and to improve the hostel and parking area there.

Also noteworthy is the laying underground of two cables belonging to France-Telecom (telephone) and EDF (electricity), which have spoiled the landscape at the approach to the col from the hamlet of Esteng (Entraunes commune).

Afternoon:

Visit to the vallon de Lauzanier and examination of the issue of mountain grazing (idem, except MM BAUDIN and JOULOT)

Studies of grazing arrangements, showing in particular that the pasture was overcrowded and that bad grazing practices were common, have resulted in pastoral units being restructured. Because such a development needs the agreement of everybody involved, the process has been slowed down, although it has become a matter of urgency since biodiversity has been reduced dramatically in the valley, which used to be an outstanding botanical habitat.

Agri-environmental measures have meant that 5-year contracts have been signed for 12 of the 28 pastoral units in the Ubaye valley as a whole, four-fifths of which are in the vallon de Lauzanier. The terms and conditions, drawn up by SERPAM, take into account the following aspects: erosion, biodiversity, protection of certain species (such as alpine eryngo), conservation of humid zones, proliferation of tall fescue, allocation of night pens, etc.

A convention has been signed with the Ecrins National Park to ensure that biodiversity is monitored.

The question of the park's landownership potential in the qualitative management of sensitive zones was discussed. The value of obtaining ownership was demonstrated by a 10 ha plot where appropriate, properly controlled practices support the growth of alpine eryngo and help reduce the amount of tall fescue.

Generally, it has to be stated that not all grazing areas have been assessed and that agri-environmental measures still only have a limited degree of effectiveness.

The grazing issue therefore remains important for the park's management. Moreover, the recent return of the wolf to the Mercantour massif has given rise to a new turn of events. This is discussed in chapter 3.

Tuesday 3 September

Visit to Lake Allos, presentation of the plan to develop the park and mountain lakes, accompanied by Ms M-O GUTH, Director, Mr G. LANDRIEU, Deputy Director, Mr M. LANTERME, mayor of Allos, Mr B. DELEUIL, special representative of the Allos town council and MM J-M CULOTTA and J-P MALAFOSSE, wardens.

The new developments carried out at Lake Allos (picnic area, wardens' hut, dry toilets) are very positive. Road access to the parking area at the park entrance is still a problem. Various improvements are in the pipeline.

The Allos sector is most advanced in terms of compiling thematic and cartographical inventories linked to the development plan. The experience acquired there is to benefit other sectors when preparing their management plans, a method which should be encouraged.

More generally, the basic issue of the PNM's aims and the partnerships – especially with the National Forestry Authority (ONF)– necessary to implement its plans is a source of concern for the Park Authority. This point should also be mentioned in the recommendations.

As far as forest management is concerned, the expert was unfortunately unable to meet with a representative of the ONF management in order to discover how this important administrative body's involvement in the PNM's activities is developing.

Just over 30% (20,637 ha) of the PNM's central zone is covered by forests, of which 18% are state-owned, 90% are managed by local authorities and 2% are private. Hence the ONF is responsible for managing a significant part of the PNM.

Because it was not possible to meet a member of the ONF's management team during the visit, a number of questions concerning the convergence of forestry policy with the Park Authority's activities remain unanswered.

These questions concern a so-called naturalistic form of silviculture, ie one which contributes towards nature conservation within the PNM by pursuing objectives concerning biodiversity, woodland structures inside and outside the park, forest verges, ecological gradients, small related biotopes, the problem of closing off environments and landscapes, controlling service roads, localising, planning and carrying out tree-felling operations and alternative forms of exploitation, establishing grades of protection (strict nature reserves), reviewing management plans, etc.

3. RETURN OF THE WOLF

The problem

It was confirmed in 1992 that the wolf had returned to the Mercantour massif. In April 1993, the Ministry of the Environment made the National Park responsible for the scientific monitoring of an area covering more than 600 km², with the assistance of a biologist and a veterinary surgeon between 1994 and 1997.

The Prefect of Alpes Maritimes has only been co-ordinating the project since 1 January 1997, relying on the technical support of the DDAF (Departmental Delegation for Agriculture and Forests), the ONC (National Hunting Authority) and the PNM.

Records show that during the winter of 1996/97, there were two main packs with 5 and 8 wolves respectively which, together with lone individuals and small peripheral groups, brought the total population to at least 19.

Attacks on domestic flocks have increased each year, reaching a total of 704 sheep killed and 124 injured in 1996.

Measures to prevent predation have been progressively strengthened: a summer cabin, electrified pens, assistant shepherds, guard dogs, etc, mainly thanks to support from the European LIFE programme.

Furthermore, the return of a major predator must lead to a review of the hunting plan in the peripheral zone so that wild animal populations can be increased and hence predation on flocks of sheep can be limited.

As far as the law is concerned, it should be noted that the wolf is mentioned in Appendix II to the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention) which came into force in France on 1 August 1990.

An inter-departmental order issued on 22 July 1993 incorporated the convention's provisions also allowed for special dispensation to capture or destroy individual animals in extreme cases.

This order was actually enforced on 25 September 1996 (see Appendix I) in order to combat the increasing number of attacks in the Authion sector. On 21 July 1997, the Ministry of the Environment gave authorisation for two wolves to be captured, subject to a number of conditions concerning what should be done with the captured animals. One would be released and scientifically monitored while the other would be moved to a wildlife centre.

It should be stressed that authorisation to capture these animals was given in strict accordance with the law.

Conditions of capture

The conditions laid down in the protocol on capture are:

1. access to flocks of sheep must be limited by the implementation of measures designed specifically to protect them;
2. attacks must be shown to continue in spite of the measures taken to reduce pressure on the sector.

Priority should be assigned to the measures in point 1.

Authorisation to traps the predators would be given after the following events:

- 6 attacks for which compensation is awarded;
- a total of at least 25 animals killed or injured over a period of 4 consecutive weeks when protection measures are fully operational.

Various viewpoints expressed

- The park management believed it was vital that national problems connected with the return of the wolf are dissociated from those concerning the management of the protected area. To penalise the park for the difficulties it has met - possibly by laying down a condition for the renewal of the Diploma - would be a mistake since the problem derives from an option chosen by society at large and involves several administrative authorities with direct responsibilities on the site.
- The trade union delegation thought that the efforts that staff in some sectors have had to make in order to deal with the new situation and with the tensions created by wolf attacks are in danger of compromising the Park Authority's primary function.
- The delegation also believed that the park had been left for too long to deal with the problem on its own and that capturing animals was incompatible with a National Park's primary duty; besides, these captures would not produce any long term solution.
- The FNE representative thought that the wolf, which has returned spontaneously to the protected area, betokened the park's quality. She considered that the only way to solve the current problems was by strengthening preventative measures.

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The expert suspects that the authorities permitted the capture of two wolves as a delaying tactic which would ease the highly passionate reaction at the time. This limited step, even if it is implemented, will not solve the basic problem of striking a happy medium between the aim of a stable population of large predators in the PNM and that of reducing attacks on domestic flocks to a balanced level determined by the limits of the preventative measures which have to be put in place.

Moreover, the return of the wolf is an opportune moment to review current hunting policy in the peripheral zone. It should be pointed out, for example, that quotas are currently fixed according to population counts in both the central and peripheral zones, which is leading to a series of distortions in terms of distribution, age groups, the possibility of spontaneous migration and settlement on land which might be suitable for large herbivorous wild animals.

4. EXAMINATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS MADE WHEN THE DIPLOMA WAS AWARDED IN 1993

1. *avoid any new scheme for a motorway link between Italy and France which may directly or indirectly affect the area of the Mercantour-Argentera Massif as a whole. In any case, the Secretariat of the Council of Europe should be informed from the beginning of any possible impact studies to be carried out;*

The PNM management has been systematically consulted regarding the plan to build a link between Cuneo and Nice. It has been agreed that, if the road is constructed, the section which crosses the Park will be underground, in the Valabres gorges sector. It should be remembered that the upper part of the tunnel (17 km) does not pass directly under the central zone of the National Park. There is still a question-mark over arrangements to transport the vast quantities of excavated through the Tinée valley.

2. *draw up and adopt a management plan for the protected area and a management plan for each homogeneous zone within the five-year period of the Diploma's validity;*

After the general plan (1994) which fixed strategic aims, the **Management plan** for the subsequent 5 years was ratified in June 1995.

The management aims adopted for the Park Authority will ultimately enable each geographical sector of the park to draw up its own **Management plan** according to its natural characteristics and local constraints, while complying with the aims of the general plan.

3. *improve consultation between the different bodies involved in the running of the park to ensure that the forestry and management, grazing and fishing activities are more closely in keeping with the overall aims of nature conservation;*

This is a live issue.

4. *endeavour without delay to establish a new consensus between all parties involved in the management of the park;*

This is also still relevant.

5. *continue and step up co-operation with the Argentera Nature Park in the fields of education, scientific research and management;*

Co-operation with the Italian park is excellent. A charter of co-operation has been drawn up, extending the parks' contributions to the European network and crowning 10 years (1987-1997) of Franco-Italian co-operation to create a cross-border identity by:

- preserving and enriching their heritage;
- promoting and enhancing the value of natural assets;
- bringing people closer together.

5. CONCLUSIONS

After visiting the park, the expert considers that the conditions for good management have been met so that renewal of the European Diploma can be recommended.

A number of additional recommendations may be suggested in order to encourage and help the management of the park in their tasks for the next five years of the Diploma's validity. These are:

1. consider the problem of the return of the wolf as part of a broader aim to regulate populations of large wild animals by significantly strengthening preventive measures to protect domestic flocks and by reviewing methods of hunting large wild ungulates in the peripheral zone;
2. examine the validity of a land acquisition policy in order to obtain ownership rights and thereby guarantee, through appropriate management, the long-term protection of certain endangered species and natural habitats;
3. continue drawing up a management plan for each geographical sector of the park;
4. maintain constant dialogue with the various partners involved in managing the protected area, in order to make sure that policies and activities are in keeping with the essential aims of environmental protection.

DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

- BERNARD-BRUNET, J. and JOUGLET, J-P. (1992) – Typologie régionale des pâturages d'altitude et procédure de classification des données spot et Landsat TM; cartographie des résultats pour l'ensemble des zones écologiquement similaires. CEMAGREF & PARC NATIONAL DU MERCANTOUR, CE Institut des applications de la télésélection, ISPA, 25 pp + appendices.
- COUTERON, P. (1990) – utilisation par chamois et ovins des formations pâturées d'altitude du Parc national du Mercantour. Etude de la vallée de la Gordolasque, CEMAGREF, 95 pp.
- PNM (1992) – Note de synthèse sur le pastoralisme dans le vallon du Lanzanier. Etudes et propositions, 5 pp.
- LAMBERTIN, M. (1990) – Bilan de l'utilisation des alpages de la Trotte, la Baulière et Mortis. Synthèse de trois années d'observations, PNM, 22 pp.
- 1994 and 1995-96 activity reports and the document "Facts and figures".
- Draft partnership charter with the Parco naturale delle alpi marittime.

- Planning documents:
 - general plan for the National Park
 - management plan 1996-2000
 - aims of the management plans
- Most recent editions of "Monts et Merveilles" (nos 2-5)
- General information on the Vallée des Merveilles
- Some information on the wolf:
 - summary report on the natural return of the wolf
 - extract from the Rural Code
 - orders of 22.07.93 and 10.10.96
 - deliberations of the CNPN
 - Two authorisations to remove individual animals
- Summary report on the Nice-Cuneo link

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

RESOLUTION (93) 21

CONCERNING THE AWARD OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA TO THE MERCANTOUR NATIONAL PARK (FRANCE)

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 3 May 1993
at the 493rd meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

The Committee of Ministers, in accordance with Article 15.a of the Statute of the Council of Europe,
Having regard to Resolution (65) 6 instituting the European Diploma;

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

Having taken note of the agreement from the French Government;

Having deliberated,

Formally awards the European Diploma, Category A, in accordance with the regulations for the
European Diploma (Resolution (91) 16), to the Mercantour National Park;

Places the aforesaid park under the patronage of the Council of Europe until 3 May 1998;

Attaches the following recommendations to the award:

1. avoid any new scheme for a motorway link between Italy and France which may directly or indirectly affect the protected AREA of the Mercantour-Argentera Massif as a whole. In any case, the Secretariat of the Council of Europe should be informed from the beginning of any possible impact studies to be carried out;
2. draw up and adopt a management plan for the protected area and a management plan for each homogeneous zone within the five-year period of the Diploma's validity;
3. improve consultation between the different bodies involved in the running of the park to ensure that the forestry and management, grazing and fishing activities are more closely in keeping with the overall aims of nature conservation;
4. endeavour without delay to establish a new consensus between all parties involved in the management of the park;
5. continue and step up co-operation with the Argentera Nature Park in the fields of education, scientific research and management.

CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

COMITÉ DES MINISTRES

RÉSOLUTION (93) 21

CONCERNANT L'OCTROI DU DIPLÔME EUROPÉEN AU PARC NATIONAL DU MERCANTOUR (FRANCE)

*(adoptée par le Comité des Ministres le 3 mai 1993,
lors de la 493^e réunion des Délégués des Ministres)*

Le Comité des Ministres, en vertu de l'article 15.a du Statut du Conseil de l'Europe,

Vu la Résolution (65) 6 instituant le Diplôme européen;

Vu les propositions du Comité directeur pour la protection et la gestion de l'environnement et du milieu naturel (CDPE);

Ayant constaté l'accord du Gouvernement de la France;

Après avoir délibéré,

Accorde solennellement le Diplôme européen au Parc national du Mercantour, dans la catégorie A, conformément au règlement du Diplôme européen (Résolution (91) 16);

Place ladite zone sous les auspices du Conseil de l'Europe jusqu'au 3 mai 1998;

Assortit l'octroi des recommandations suivantes:

1. éviter que tout projet d'une nouvelle liaison autoroutière entre l'Italie et la France ne porte atteinte, directement ou indirectement, à l'entité protégée du massif Mercantour-Argentera. En tout état de cause, le Secrétariat du Conseil de l'Europe devra en être informé dès le début d'une éventuelle procédure d'étude d'impact;
2. élaborer et adopter, dans les cinq ans de la validité du Diplôme, un plan d'aménagement et des plans de gestion pour chaque territoire homogène de la zone protégée;
3. améliorer la concertation entre les différents partenaires impliqués dans le fonctionnement du parc en vue d'aboutir à une gestion forestière et à des activités de pêche et de pâturage plus en accord avec les objectifs de protection du milieu naturel;
4. rechercher instamment un nouveau consensus entre tous les partenaires concernés par la gestion du parc;
5. poursuivre et intensifier la coopération avec le Parc naturel de l'Argentera dans les domaines éducatif, scientifique et de la gestion.

APPENDIX II

DRAFT RESOLUTION

on the renewal of the European Diploma
to the Mercantour National Park

The Committee of Ministers, in accordance with 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 (93) 21 awarding the European Diploma, Category A, to the Mercantour National Park,

Having regard to the proposals of the Committee for the Activities of the Council of Europe in the field of Biological and Landscape Diversity (CO-DBP),

Renews until 3 May 2003 the European Diploma awarded to the Mercantour National Park,

Attaches the following recommendations to the renewal:

1. consider the problem of the return of the wolf as part of a broader aim to regulate populations of large wild animals by significantly strengthening preventive measures to protect domestic flocks and by reviewing methods of hunting large wild ungulates in the peripheral zone;
2. examine the validity of a land acquisition policy in order to obtain ownership rights and thereby gain the basic expertise to guarantee, through appropriate management, the long-term protection of certain endangered species and natural habitats;
3. continue drawing up a management plan for each geographical sector of the park;
4. maintain constant dialogue with the various partners involved in managing the protected area, in order to make sure that policies and activities are in keeping with the essential aims of environmental protection.