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

Strasbourg, 6 - 8 March 1996

**VANOISE NATIONAL PARK
(France)**

Category A

Renewal

On-the-spot appraisal
by Mr P HUNKELER (Switzerland)

1. INTRODUCTION

The European Diploma, category A, was awarded to the Vanoise National Park in 1976. It was renewed in 1981, 1986 and most recently in 1991 for the period up to 18 March 1996.

The present on-the-spot appraisal was carried out between 2 and 4 August 1995 for the purposes of the decision to be taken on the renewal of the Diploma for a further 5-year period.

The well organised visit took place under the guidance of Mr Emmanuel de Guillebon, the Park's manager, and in the company of Mr Jean-Pierre Martinot, a "chargé de mission". The following aspects were particularly dealt with: the current situation, scientific work (at Chambéry), relations with agriculture (at Lanslebourg), problems concerning the Iseran (at the town halls of Bonneval and Val d'Isère, at Arses and at the Col itself), the Park's resources and the management of public pressure (in the valley of Prariond), public information (at the Porte du Bois), and relations with the National Forestry Office (at Plan de Tueda).

Discussions and field visits were conducted with the following:

Mr Claude GUILLOT, Mayor of Bonneval-sur-Arc;

Mr Serge PAQUIN, Mayor of Val d'Isère;

Mr Camille CHEDAL-ANGLAY, "département" councillor, chairman of the Park's governing board;

Mr Albert TOURT, president of the Val Cenis dairy co-operative and member of the Park's governing board, accompanied by Mr Jean LONGUEVILLE, agricultural adviser;

Mr Pierre PAPADOPOULOS, regional officer of the National Forestry Office, accompanied by Mr BAUDIN, beat supervisor;

Mr Gilles PARIGOT, Vice-President of the French Federation of Nature Protection Associations (FRAPNA), Savoy;

Mr Jean-Pierre DIDIER, the Park's deputy manager, Mrs Véronique PLAIGE and Mr Yves BRUGIERES, "chargés de mission", Mr Gérard CARATTI and Mr Louis EYRARD, area managers, Mr Nicolas BAYARD and Mr Jean-Luc ETIEVANT, wardens/instructors.

The expert takes this opportunity to thank all the above-mentioned for their helpfulness and frankness in the discussions he had with them.

He would also like to thank the Park's manager and his assistants for the excellent organisation of the visit, their knowledge of the site, their patience in answering his numerous questions and their great keenness to enhance and preserve the Park.

2. SITUATION AND VALUE OF THE PARK

The Vanoise National Park was established in 1963. Situated between the high valleys of the Tarentaise and the Maurienne in the "département" of Savoy, it protects high-mountain environments ranging in altitude from 1280 metres to 3855 metres. Its European importance is widely recognised. It shares a 14 km border with the Italian Grand Paradiso National Park.

The central zone covers 52 839 ha, the peripheral zone 145 000 ha. The European Diploma mainly concerns the central zone, but the situation of the peripheral zone, which is essential to the Park's balance and sound ecological functioning, must also be taken into consideration.

Twenty-eight local authorities are affected by the Park, 20 of them have part of their territories in the central zone. The local authorities own most of the Park (47 610 ha). A total of 5218 ha is privately owned, with 11 ha belonging to the state.

The Park's aims are to protect the Alpine landscape, fauna and flora and to educate the public.

Its peripheral zone is the subject of an enhancement programme based on local natural and cultural resources, agriculture and tourism, special events, training and information. In fact, this zone, especially on the Tarentaise side, contains France's finest skiing areas. Prestigious Alpine ski resorts have developed to such an extent that the region now boasts more than 60 % of all French ski lifts and can accommodate more than 220 000 skiers.

It is in this particular context that the Park is developing its protection and special-event programmes in the peripheral zone.

3. ADMINISTRATION

The Park is run by a state establishment which has its own budget. Its governing board comprises representatives of the ministerial departments involved, local councillors and members of socio-occupational bodies, scientific bodies and nature conservation associations as well as several individuals appointed by the Ministry responsible for the protection of nature and the environment. The governing board delegates some of its powers to an 8-member standing committee.

A 25-member scientific committee is consulted on every management project, whether in the central or the peripheral zone.

The Park has a staff of about 50 people . This figure increases with the recruitment of temporary staff, such as receptionists, during the summer season. Several permanent employees are on the point of retiring. While the question of continuity will not be too difficult to solve, there will be no guarantee, in view of the budgetary decrease, that all the posts will actually be filled again rapidly, even though the Park's work is continually increasing. This budgetary decrease is also affecting the sum available for the upkeep and renovation of footpaths and buildings.

4. MANAGEMENT

4.1 General points

A thorough study, whose usefulness and value of which should be stressed, was carried out in 1994. The role of the Park was defined as follows in a document unanimously adopted by the governing board: "The purpose of the Vanoise National Park, as an institution, is to devote itself to the conservation of its exceptional natural heritage and to contribute, notably through a network, to the protection of nature outside its own area".

The document also mentions the particular character of the central zone, the principles of dynamic protection (optimising the natural biodiversity of species and ecosystems), the characteristics of the natural heritage (with its scientific, cultural and economic value), the Park's contributions towards the promoting of nature conservation (through the admission of visitors), the management of the peripheral zone (which should be developed in a manner compatible with the proximity of an exceptional protected area) and the Park's membership of several networks (French national parks, protected areas of France, international protected areas).

4.2 Zoning

The Park has a central zone, which is very strictly regulated on the basis of the national parks legislation, and a peripheral zone, where the Park's authorities have a say in all projects concerning infrastructure, urbanisation, installations and management of the natural environment.

In its peripheral zone, the Park has no formal right of intervention but must persuade primarily through negotiation. However, a charter concluded between the "department" of Savoy and the Park officialises the latter's role as an adviser in nature conservation matters and enables inventories and applied studies to be carried out in numerous fields, thanks to funds from the "department", the state and the Park.

There are nature reserves adjacent or near to the Park which are managed by the Park: the reserves at Tignes (La Sache and La Grande Motte), la Grande Sassi re, the Val d'Is re reserve (col de l'Iseran, the municipalities of Val d'Is re and Bonneval-sur-arc) and the Plan de Tueda reserve (municipality of Allues), placed under the responsibility of the Park and the National Forestry Office.

The situation in these reserves is very varied. The Sache and Grande Motte reserves are the remains of a former, more extensive protected area. The Grande Sassi re reserve is a well protected area, whereas the Col d'Is ran reserve contains many ski lifts and ski runs. The Plan de Tueda reserve protects some exceptional natural items adjacent to the Park, such as an extensive area of cembra pines (Oralla pine forest). It also includes a recreational lake which was equipped before the reserve was protected.

4.3 Wild fauna

The Vanoise National Park, which was originally created primarily to protect the ibex, has fully served its purpose in this respect. The population currently numbers about 1 250.

The ibex, whose distribution area extends naturally towards the nearby massifs, are regularly culled for well-organised reintroduction operations.

There are about 4 700 chamois. Their situation is also favourable. However, the pressure from hunting is still heavy in the peripheral zone, and the chamois still cannot establish stable colonies, in spite of the shooting plans introduced.

Many bird species use the Park as a hunting or rearing area, but they nest outside its borders. Examples are the golden eagle and the black grouse, whose survival is dependent on the management of the peripheral zone.

4.4 Flora

The Park protects a typical, varied Alpine flora, including numerous rare species. An inventory of the botanical resources in the peripheral zone has revealed some highly valuable associations and numerous sites of community importance in the Vanoise massif. This inventory, mainly covering rare species and several plant groups recognised at European level, should be gradually supplemented by the inclusion of other uniform or variegated plant groups. An inventory of rare or endangered species in Savoy is also being prepared under the Park's supervision.

4.5 Forest

Relations between the National Forestry Office (ONF) and the Park, are generally regular and constructive both as regards the management of 422 ha of forest in the central zone and as regards the much larger expanses of woodland in the peripheral zone. The NF is also involved in fauna management, notably in connection with counting operations. Moreover, it carries out a considerable amount of equipping (footpaths, bridges, etc.) on the basis of contracts with the Park.

4.6 Agriculture

The central zone contains numerous high-mountain pastures where there are both young cattle and large herds of dairy cows, numbering up to 120-150 head. This figure is attributable to the quantity of milk needed for the production of Beaufort cheese. The investment necessary for bringing the high-mountain cheese dairies up to European standards has also fostered a concentration of herds.

The number of sheep is still on the increase. They are generally summered in large, untended flocks, which has negative consequences in terms of environmental pressure.

The Park has initiated detailed studies of the domestic livestock present, its impact on natural vegetation and its relations with wild animals.

The Park has also developed close, constructive collaboration with agricultural circles in both the central and the peripheral zone. It is now associated with agri-environmental campaigns, some of which it promoted itself. It has thoroughly reviewed its actions in this sphere on the basis of the principle of maintaining agricultural and agri-pastoral practices in the Vanoise area (subject to their compatibility with the aim of preserving biodiversity in the

central zone). However, it has not always succeeded in preventing or correcting schemes with adverse effects on the environment and the countryside, such as very drastic land consolidation operation at Bessans. It has to be contend with problems of damage by game, widely varying in magnitude, such as the upheaval of meadows by marmots or wild boar.

4.7 Cultural heritage

The Park is pursuing an active programme to preserve the architectural heritage, notably by contributing to the renovation of typical buildings and the enhancement of historical ones. It has withdrawn from projects somewhat irrelevant to its interests, such as the renovation of forts or the enhancement of religious art, in order to concentrate on the traditional architectural heritage. Mention should be made in this connection of the excellent technical data sheets recently published on traditional housing in the Vanoise valleys.

5. EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

Information still plays a particularly important part in the Park's activities. The information programme includes the production of documents and the organisation of special events, guided tours, discovery courses, conferences and audio-visual shows. The localities involved, being anxious to promote summer tourism, are heavily intensifying demand in these matters, so that Val d'Isère would now like to have a Park centre in its area. It would be desirable if the localities that use the Park to promote their tourism were to contribute to the management of the extra visitors attracted.

The Park is studying the delicate balance to be maintained between the accommodation functions (bed and board) of its refuges and entrance lodges and their role in informing visitors and raising their awareness.

6. RESEARCH

A regular, highly active research programme is being carried out in the Park and the neighbouring regions. The programme's results continue to be pursued to good account by the production of high-quality information for local councillors and the general public as well as for the managers concerned.

The Park co-ordinates several programmes conducted jointly with the other French national parks, particularly concerning the use of geographical information systems.

The Park has introduced a new approach which is proving highly fruitful, viz the setting up of topic groups comprising researchers and practitioners. This ensures not only a sound scientific basis but also very realistic application of results as well as strong motivation at all levels. At the moment, groups are working on flora, galliformes, birds of prey, chiroptera and ungulates.

7. RELATIONS WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The Park's relations with local authorities in the area are varied. Several local authorities no longer see the Park as an obstacle to development, but rather as an asset to be respected and promoted for the benefit of the region's image, in collaboration with the managers of the protected zone.

With other local authorities, relations are more strained. For instance, Bonneval-sur-Arc, now heavily in debt because it no longer receives its long-standing income from Electricité de France, blames the Park for all its troubles. Relations with Val d'Isère are complicated by the settlement of the Col d'Iseran issue. Generally, the majority of the local authorities do not seem ready to perform "disinterested" acts for the Park or for the natural environments in the peripheral zone; instead, any improvements in the situation tend to be the result of discussions or even deals involving new installations or activities.

8. OUTSTANDING PROBLEMS

8.1 Ski lifts / Val d'Isère - Bonneval-sur-Arc link

This link would pass straight through the Park's central zone. According to the Park's well documented argument, the impact would be dramatic if on- and off-piste skiing were allowed over the whole southern side of the Iseran massif, one of the Park's key areas for the conservation of flora and fauna.

Fortunately, the project was recently turned down for the fourth time by the authorities concerned, notably the Ministry for the Environment.

The possibility of a tunnel link under the Park is still under discussion. It would save the central zone from being damaged and would therefore be acceptable provided that it did not lead to excessive tourist presence in the high Maurienne valley in the peripheral zone.

8.2 Ski lifts / equipping of the Chavière glacier

This project, limited to 3 ski lifts whose route was drawn on a map of the glacier, was authorised in 1973, before the European Diploma was awarded. The project is now dormant.

8.3 Ski lifts / Col d'Iseran nature reserve in the territories of Val d'Isère and Bonneval

The situation has continued to deteriorate following the increase in the number of ski lifts and the marking out of ski runs. The only reasonable solution is the one proposed by the Park, viz:

- partial downgrading of the reserve (702 ha), with continuation of the hunting ban;
- stricter protection of the remaining 321 ha;

- creation of a nature reserve of over 300 ha at La Bailletaz (which would provide a link between the Grande Sassièrè and the Park in an area adjacent to the Gran Paradiso).

Appropriate protection would also be needed for some outstanding plant groups still remaining in the downgraded zone.

This project will very shortly be reactivated because the Pissaia ski lifts (summer skiing) are worn out and need to be replaced or improved.

Considering the number of unkept promises in this matter, permission to undertake this work should not be given until the compensatory zone (Baïettaz) has been duly protected, though a certain flexibility may be accepted concerning the hunting of ungulates.

8.4 Ski lifts / general problem

The network of ski lifts around the Park inevitably generates an influx of skiers into the Park or its vicinity. This phenomenon is increasing hand-in-hand with the improvement in the equipment and techniques of skiers, who are now seeking more difficult and less prepared slopes. Moreover, the work carried out for the Olympic Games to facilitate access to the resorts has attracted numerous skiers who come just for the day to clock up as many runs as possible. The development of off-piste skiing on the southern side of the Iseran, at Bonneval, is being intensified by the use of helicopters for the return journey to Val d'Isère (happily, dropping off skiers on the slopes by helicopter is forbidden, but not picking them up again).

The existence of an already vast and still expanding area where skiing is actually done, as opposed to the equipped and secure skiing area, is quite evident from a study of the maps drawn up by the Park, particularly for the Val d'Isère region.

8.5 Staff and budget

The increase in the Park's activities should result in an adaptation of its staff and budget, whereas the replacement of employees who retire is not in fact guaranteed and the budget has been greatly reduced this year. Moreover, the greater involvement of the wardens in scientific monitoring activities and the management of the fauna and flora makes them less available for maintenance work on paths and buildings, which has to be entrusted to outside contractors. The Park's architectural heritage also calls for considerable expenditure on maintenance or renovation.

8.6 Water

The increase in water needs (drinking water, supplies for the snow-making machines) has fortunately not resulted in any new pressures on the Park.

Water pollution problems in the Park and the peripheral zone, caused by certain refuges, such as the one at Col de la Vanoise (Félix Faure), or by agricultural discharge due in particular to the concentration of production at Beaufort cheese production, are being monitored by the Park, though no easily applicable solutions are yet in sight.

8.7 Relations with the Italian National Park of Gran Paradiso

In 1990, the difficulties the Gran Paradiso were experiencing greatly complicated relations with the Vanoise Park. Since then the situation has improved considerably; indeed a neighbourhood charter has been drawn up in order to stimulate joint projects aimed at bringing people and institutions closer together as well as introducing new techniques for managing the environment and promoting tourism.

9. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The situation in the Vanoise National Park is positive, and the expert recommends that the European Diploma be renewed for a further 5-year period.

In so doing, the Council of Europe would be confirming the Park's European importance and giving recognition to the efforts by the relevant authorities to preserve its integrity.

In view of the pressures which nevertheless continue to be exerted on this protected area, it is still necessary to reiterate the general conditions laid down at the time of the previous renewals of the European Diploma, viz:

In the Park's central zone no schemes or activities should be accepted that are contrary to the objectives and criteria of category A of the European diploma Regulations (Resolution (73) 4), which state:

- that the essential motivation for the protection of areas in this category is the protection of the European heritage of fauna and flora, its environment and ecosystem;
- that the protection criteria, which these areas must meet are prescribed by the need for as stringent biological protection as possible; amongst other things, development by means of economic activities of a touristic or industrial nature (such as the operation of ski lifts) is not permitted.

To these conditions should be added a reminder of the inviolability of the Park's borders and the need to settle the question of the Col de l'Iseran reserve (Val d'Isère) in the way proposed by the Park.

Moreover, the following recommendations are proposed, primarily in order to encourage measures already planned by the Park:

- continuation, in the peripheral zone, of a systematic policy of making inventories, protecting biotopes and species and monitoring activities liable to have an impact on the central zone.
- intensification of the information and awareness-arousing policy at the entrances to the Park and in the refuges and improvement of the signposting of the borders of the Park and the adjacent nature reserves.

- continuation of the monitoring and documentation of activities liable to disturb the fauna, such as off-piste skiing or the approaching of animals away from the footpaths, and taking of the appropriate measures where necessary.
- maintenance of the Park's involvement in agricultural questions, particularly the study of livestock trends and effects in the central zone and agri-environmental measures in the peripheral zone.
- maintenance or even expansion of the Park's staff and budget in order to enable it to deal adequately with the steady increase in its tasks and the upkeep of its heritage.

A P P E N D I X I

RESOLUTION (91) 13

Concerning the renewal of the European Diploma awarded to the Vanoise Park (France)

(adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 17 June 1991
at the 460th 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 (76) 14 awarding the European Diploma to the Vanoise National Park ;

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

Renews the European Diploma awarded to the Vanoise National Park in Category A until 18 March 1996 :

Attaches to the renewal the following conditions :

1. prohibition in the park's central zone of schemes and activities contrary to the objectives and criteria of Category A of the Diploma regulations (Resolution (73) 4), according to which:

- the essential motivation of places in this category is the protection of the European heritage of flora and fauna, its environments and ecosystems ;

- the criteria for protection which these places must meet are prescribed by the need for as stringent biological protection as possible ; economic activities such as tourism and industry are not permitted, for example ski lifts ;

2. to these conditions are added a reminder of the inviolability of the park's borders and settlement of the question of the Iseran reserve (commune of Val-d'Isère).

Addresses the following recommendations to the authorities responsible for management of the park :

- continue, in the peripheral zone, with a systematic policy of drawing up inventories, protecting natural environments and species, and monitoring activities which may have an impact on the central zone ;

- continue the policy of cultural and scientific events in the peripheral zone, such as the establishment of a museum of religious traditions at Lanslebourg-Mont-Cenis, of a mineralogical and mining museum at Peisey-Nancroix and of an information centre at Tignes;

- reinforce the information and awareness policy at points of access to the park and at the refuges ;

- increase the park's commitment to the search for solutions to agricultural problems, particularly in response to livestock trends in the central zone and in connection with measures to counter the move away from agriculture in the peripheral zone.

APPENDIX II

Draft Resolution

concerning the renewal of the European Diploma
awarded to the Vanoise National Park (France)

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 (76) 14 awarding the European Diploma to the Vanoise National Park;

Having regard to the proposals of the Steering Committee for the Protection and Management of the Environment and Nature (CDPE),

Hereby renews until 18 March 2001 the European Diploma awarded to the Vanoise National Park in category A,

I. At the same time, it subjects renewal to the following conditions:

1. The inviolability of the Park's borders shall be maintained and the question of the Col d'Iseran reserve (Val d'Isère) settled in the way proposed by the Park.
2. Inside the Park's central zone, no schemes or activities shall be accepted that are contrary to the motivation, the objectives and the criteria of Category A under the Regulations for the European Diploma, state:
 - that the essential motivation for the protection of areas in this category is the protection of the European heritage of flora and fauna, its environment and its ecosystem;
 - that the protection criteria which these sites must meet are prescribed by the need for as stringent biological protection as possible; amongst other things, development through economic activities of a touristic or industrial nature (such as the operation of ski lifts) are not permitted.

II. It also attaches the following recommendations to renewal:

1. In the peripheral zone, a systematic policy of making inventories, protecting biotopes and species and monitoring activities liable to have an impact on the central zone should be continued.

2. The information and awareness-raising policy at the Park's entrances and in its refuges as well as the improvement of the signposting of the Park's borders of the Park and the adjacent nature reserves should be intensified.
3. The monitoring and documentation of activities liable to disturb the fauna, such as off-piste skiing or the approaching of animals away from the footpaths, should be continued and the appropriate measures taken where necessary.
4. The Park's involvement in agricultural questions, particularly the study of livestock trends and effects in the central zone and agri-environmental measures in the peripheral zone, should be maintained.
5. The Park's staff and budget should be maintained or even increased to enable it to deal properly with the steady increase in its tasks and the upkeep of its heritage.