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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

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REPORT

**ON THE SPOT EXPERT APPRAISAL OF THE
MARITIME ALPS NATURE PARK**

(ITALY)

27-28 June 2017

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1. THE MARITIME ALPS NATURE PARK. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Argentera Nature Park (the Park's original name) was officially established in May 1980. In 1984 the special nature reserve of 228 hectares for the *juniperus phoenicea* population, which is situated north of Valdieri, was added to the Park. Then in 1995, another extension to the Park led to a change of name and became known as the **Maritime Alps Nature Park**.

The main aims of the Park are to:

1. protect and safeguard the natural, environmental and scenic features of its whole area;
2. guarantee the safeguarding and protection of the immovable property within the Park;
3. organise the territory for recreational, educational, scientific and cultural purposes; and
4. help in the promotion of agricultural, forestry and pastoral activities.

The protected area ranges in altitude from 800m to about 3,300m, the height of the southern peak. Its territory encompasses numerous small valleys cutting deeply into the northern slopes of the Maritime Alps with the highest main massifs of Monte Matto, Argentera and Gelas. It has specific rules for the use of the whole area, including penalties for infringements of the rules on traffic, cleanliness, noise, the protection of its biodiversity, while permitting exceptions for management or study purposes. It also has specific rules on selective culling for the regulation of animal populations and on the capture and reintroduction of species.

The only inhabited villages within the park are Sant. Anna, a small village at the border of the park and with very few winter residents, and Tetti Gaina, a little hamlet further up the road. The annual average of visitors is 300,000, but most of these are concentrated in the summer period.

2. THE COUNCIL & MANAGEMENT OF THE MARITIME ALPS NATURE PARK.

The Maritime Alps Nature Park falls under the central authority of the Ministero dell'Ambiente e della Tutela del Territorio e del Mare, while the Regione Piemonte is the Authority responsible for its management.

The Board of Directors of the Management Board is composed of a President appointed by the President of the Regional Council; a Vice-president, designated by the Community of the Protected Area; and five board members representing respectively the environmental association, the Municipality of Valdieri, the Municipality of Entracque, the Community of the Protected Area, and the farmers' association. Among its various functions, the Board decides on the annual budgets and programmes of the Park. The Staff consists of the Director, a Deputy Director, 7 administration officers, 7 territory management officers, 6 sustainable development and communication officers, 5 conservation officers and 25 rangers.

It is to be noted that since January 2016 the Management and Administration of the Maritime Alps Nature Park was also given the responsibility of running the Marguareis Nature Park as well as five other small, scattered reserves (Ciciu del Villar, Benevagienna, Crava Morozzo, Sorgenti del Belbo and Grotte di Bossea), all with very different characteristics.

3. EUROPEAN DIPLOMA AWARD (1993) & RENEWALS (1998, 2003 & 2008)

3.1. Diploma Award 1993.

The Maritime Alps Nature Park (then known as The Argentera Nature Park) was awarded the Council of Europe's European Diploma in 1993 after an on-the-spot appraisal was carried out on 10-12 August 1992 by Alfred Froment (from Belgium) who was accompanied by Mr H. HACOURT, Principal Administrative Officer representing the Secretariat. The main subjects of discussion were: the views of local people and elected representatives on the establishment of the park; the problem of the heavy influx of tourists and plans to develop improved public reception facilities; fishing reserves; the perimeter of the future buffer zone; the value of the small cultural heritage; the need for a land policy in the Valasco valley area; and the labelling of Park products. The main topics of discussion were: the perimeter of the Park; changing the status of the Park from a Regional to a National Nature Park; the relationship between the large wild fauna and grazing for sheep; the need for management to

maintain biodiversity; the Park's importance as a natural laboratory for academic research; and the need to control recreational activities in the high mountains, particularly climbing.

3.2. Renewal of the Diploma 1998.

The validity of the Maritime Alps Nature Park's European Diploma was due to expire on 3 May 1998. An on-the-spot appraisal was again carried out by Alfred Froment to examine whether a renewal would be justified. The visit took place on 4 and 5 September 1997. This time the expert was not accompanied by a representative of the Secretariat. The European Diploma was renewed in 1998 until May 2003. The main subjects discussed, amongst others, were the National Park status; the integration of the Special Nature Reserve (Phoenician juniper) within the limits of the Park; the management of tourist numbers by offering well-integrated reception facilities and information; and the preparation of a landscape plan for the sensitive areas of the park and its surroundings, for inclusion in a new management plan for the protected zone.

3.3. Second Renewal of the Diploma 2003.

In 2003 the Diploma was renewed for the second time until May 2008 after the third on-the-spot appraisal was carried out by Jean-Pierre Ribaut (from Switzerland), who was not accompanied by a representative of the Secretariat. The expert highlighted the natural, historical and cultural values of the park and mentioned the same problems discussed in previous reports related particularly to the proposed project for the construction of a micro-hydropower plant, as well as the shortage of staff members.

3.4. Third Renewal of the Diploma 2008.

The Diploma Award was renewed for the third time in 2008. This time no expert was sent to carry out an on-the-spot appraisal. However, discussions were held between the Secretariat and the Administration of the Park and the following two conditions and four recommendations were attached to this third renewal.

4. CONDITIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS ATTACHED TO THE 3RD RENEWAL 2008

4.1 Conditions

- (1) Following the environmental impact studies carried out in the framework of the project to build a micro-hydroelectric power plant in the Meris Valley, keep watch over possible further development of the project and, if the project is to go ahead, the Council of Europe Secretariat must be immediately informed and no decision taken before a special on-the-spot appraisal has been carried out;
- (2) Same condition for the proposed project concerning the piping of the hot spa water from Terme di Valdieri down the valley.

4.2. Recommendations

- (1) Pursue co-operation efforts to financially support research activity on biodiversity protection and sustainable development;
- (2) Examine the opportunity to implement measures relating to the regional legislation on contiguous areas to the territory of the municipality of Vinadio and to the special nature reserve of Phoenician juniper; and step up, as far as possible, a territorial management project for the area;
- (3) Inform and organise actions for the awareness-raising of local stakeholders, in particular concerning sustainable tourism. Development projects, even those located outside the park border should be avoided when having potential negative impact on the protected area, considering the priority for conservation and sustainable tourism of the territory as a whole.
- (4) Pursue the co-operation with Mercantour National Park, in order to set up a trans-frontier protected area.

5. TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THIS YEAR'S (2017) ON-THE-SPOT APPRAISAL

The period of validity of the European Diploma awarded to the Maritime Alps Nature Park is due to expire next year (2018). At its meeting on 7 March 2016, the Group of Specialists on the European

Diploma for Protected Areas (EDPA) decided to carry out on-the-spot appraisals to the areas which are subject to the EDPA renewal in 2018. Hence the Group decided to carry out an on-the-spot appraisal visit to the Maritime Alps Nature Park, which received the agreement of the national authorities. The objective of the on-the-spot appraisal is to assess whether the conditions of the site remain the same as when the Diploma was awarded and extended, or whether they have improved or deteriorated.

The Secretariat of the Council of Europe informed the undersigned that he was entrusted with this task in a letter dated 23rd June 2017, and that he would not be accompanied by a representative of the Secretariat. It was agreed that the undersigned would arrive at the small village of Sant. Anna, which is situated within the boundary of the Park, in the afternoon on 26th June, carry out the two-day programme on 27th and 28th, and depart in the morning on 29th. During my stay I was booked for 3 nights at La Casaregina, a small hotel at Sant. Anna.

6. DETAILS OF VISIT

Date	Details of the programme
27.06.2017	<p>09.00: Meeting at the Park's Head Office in Valdieri with the Council President, Paolo Salsotto, the Director Giuseppe Canavese, and Park Ranger James Beauchamp. Main topics: General Introduction to the Park; Administration; Stakeholders, Residents; Tourism; Hunting and Fishing.</p> <p>10.30: Visit to the Valasco area of the Park. Visiting the Rifugio Valasco and meeting the manager Andrea Cismondi.</p> <p>12.30: Visit to the Park's Visitors/Interpretive Centre at Terme</p> <p>13.00: Business Lunch at Sant. Anna with Director Giuseppe Canavese; Michela Formento, manageress of the Casa Alpina hostel and representative of stakeholders' association 'Ecoturismo in Marittime'; Nanni Villani, tourism officer for Parco Alpi Marittime; and Park Ranger James Beauchamp.</p> <p>14.30: Visit to the Rye Museum.</p> <p>16.00: Visit to an Archeological Bronze Age site at Valdieri.</p> <p>16.30: Meeting at the Park's Head Office in Valdieri with the mayor of Valdieri, Giacomo Gaiotti. Also present at the meeting: the Council President, Paolo Salsotto; the Director Giuseppe Canavese; Nanni Villani, tourism officer for Parco Alpi Marittime; and Park Ranger James Beauchamp.</p>
28.06.2017	<p>09.00: Visit to the Natural Park Marguareis' offices in Chiusa di Pesio; to the Campo Fitoalimurgico; and to the plant biodiversity centre, which was introduced by a contracted botanist, Valentina Carasso. Meeting also with Erika Chiecchio (tourism and schools activities) and Bruno Gallino (botanist), as the place also offers services for environmental education. Accompanied by the Director Giuseppe Canavese and Park Ranger James Beauchamp.</p> <p>10.30: Visit to the Certosa di Pesio (Carthusian Monastery) and to Pian delle Gorre area of the Natural Park Marguareis. Accompanied by the Park's Council President Paolo Salsotto, Director Giuseppe Canavese and Park Ranger James Beauchamp.</p> <p>14.30 - 1700: Visit to Maritime Alps Nature Park offices in Entracque and the 'Uomini e Lupi' WildLife Centre including a visit to the three-floor tower in the centre of the wolf enclosure and a presentation by Stefania Rivelli. Also accompanied by the</p>

	<p>Director Giuseppe Canavese and Park Ranger James Beauchamp.</p> <p>19.00: Final meeting with the Council President Paolo Salsotto and Mayor of Entracque, Gian Pietro Pepino at the Casa Regina Hotel had to be cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances.</p>
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Table 1: Programme of Visit

7. INFLUENCE OF THE AWARD OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA

It has been noted that the Park uses the European Diploma to enhance its image. The Diploma symbol has been placed alongside the Park’s logo at the entrance to all its buildings and on all the Park’s publications. The European Diploma Flag is also shown both at the new administration headquarters and at the operational headquarters. The European Diploma logo is also inserted in the Park website (www.parcoalpimaritime.it) and in the cross-border portal (www.marittimemercantour.eu) Both sites have a link with the European Diploma page on the website of the Council of Europe.

8. INFORMATION, EDUCATION & RESEARCH

The undersigned has been impressed how much importance is given by the management and administration of the Park to the information and education of the public in general and the high quality of research that has been carried out during the Park’s existence. This is reflected in the large quantity and range of first class, highly illustrated, publications – an array of books, maps, information leaflets, etc. – published by the Park, aimed to reach different sectors of the public, as well as to raise awareness and appreciation of the biodiversity of the Park and nature conservation in general. It is also reflected in the amount of research carried out on various natural and/or cultural aspects within the park, several of which have been carried out and presented by students as their thesis. It is also reflected in the variety of well displayed notices in the Park of what one can do, or is prohibited to do.

The Visitors Centre is a showcase of what is found, as well as what is carried out, in the park – an excellent interpretation of the park and its natural treasures. Monitoring of wolves, bearded vultures and other wild species, as well as botanical studies are some of the research carried out at the park. It would be impossible to elaborate on all the projects related to information, education and research carried out, or being envisaged. However, I cannot leave out the impressive, innovative information centre and enclosure on wolf called “Uomini e Lupi”, which opened in June 2010 and continues its activity with success.

The Centre offers the visitor an opportunity to deepen knowledge about the wolf and its behaviour. A fenced area of about eight hectares hosts some specimens of *Canis lupus italicus*. These specimens could not live in freedom, either because they are victims of serious accidents or have been born in captivity. From a three-story tower in the centre of the area, which is reached through a tunnel, one can see a large portion of the enclosed space. If in the wild the sight of a wolf is an event, it should be pointed out that even in the centre wolf observation is a wonderful event. The centre also includes an exhibition dedicated to the man-wolf relationship.

The Park is also the co-ordinating beneficiary of the EU LIFE WOLFALPS project. The aim is to promote cohabitation of wolves and people across the whole of the Alps.

9. COLLABORATION WITH MERCANTOUR NATIONAL PARK

The Maritime Alps Nature Park and the Mercantour National Park have been twinned since 1987 and this has promoted active collaboration, particularly in management of the large animals and the development of high-profile projects such as the reintroduction of the ibex and the bearded vulture. The close collaboration with Mercantour National Park continued in 2016, when they finalised two projects related respectively to environmental education aimed principally at schools and to scientific studies for the UNESCO World Heritage Site “Alpi del Mediterraneo” candidature dossier.

The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation “Parco europeo Marittime Mercantour” played a fundamental role in 2016. This international body has worked on two important projects, the

Action Plan 2016/2020 and the dossier for the “Le Alpi del Mediterraneo” UNESCO World Heritage Site candidature.

The Action Plan for 2016/2020 aims to affirm consolidation of collaboration between the two Parks. The Plan has seven main themes and for each of these the common objectives and tasks are defined. Among the themes one finds the improvement of sharing knowledge and management of the natural heritage, as well as the enhancement and management of cultural and scenic heritage. Raising awareness among park territory residents and coordinating surveillance work to create a European protected area are also included in the Action Plan.

Animal populations also treat the area of Mercantour and Argentera as a single massif. Many ibex have their summer range on Mercantour and their winter range on Argentera; and vice-versa for a number of mouflons, while large numbers of chamois are living on both sides. Their variations in climatic conditions due to the two sides' different levels of exposure to the sun favour the development of a greater variety of species of flora, from Mediterranean scrub to alpine tundra. For the same reasons, botanists consider the Maritime Alps of both massifs to be the most significant area of endemism in the Alps, both because of the large number of endemic species and the presence of very rare species.

10. FISHING & HUNTING

With regard to the protection of the environment and conservation of its natural and cultural features, it has been noted that the Maritime Alps Nature Park is governed by strict regulations. These also apply to fishing and hunting. Fishing, takes place in the fishing reserves along the streams, rivers and in natural and artificial lakes, and it brings some income to the communes.

In the past there was some fierce opposition of a small group of hunters to any former extension of the park. But now hunting is well under control in the Park's territory and no illegal hunting takes place.

However, in 2011 the new Regional administration modified the law L.R.19 29/06/2009, which had been approved by the previous administration. The changes resulted in a stronger central control and weakened the authority of the administration of the park's management in issuing regulations for example related to hunting and other conservation matters.

11. THE PROPOSED MINI HYDROELECTRIC POWER PLANT AND THE PROJECT CONCERNING THE SPA TERME DI VALDIERI

The plans for a mini-hydroelectric plant in the Rio Meris valley, which had been proposed by the Valdieri municipality, have been completely abandoned. Mitigating embellishing works have also been carried out in the immediate surrounding area of an existing hydro-electric plant, the Tetti Gaina plant.

The proposed project to bring the spa water from “Terme di Valdieri” further down the valley has also been abandoned. This would have entailed the construction of a pipeline under the provincial road in the Park area.

It is to be noted that presently no new hydro-electric plants are allowed to be constructed in the protected area.

12. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to put on record my sincere thanks and appreciation to:

- (a) The President of the Council Paolo Salsotto for discussing with me various subjects related to the Park and for accompanying me on some of the visits;
- (b) The Director Giuseppe Canavese, for preparing the programme of my visit; for accompanying me for most of the site visits; for bearing with me in answering all my questions; for delegating Ranger James Beauchamp to accompany me during the whole time of the two-day visit and driving me about; and for making available to me a large amount of publications;

- (c) Ms Tania Braulio from the Secretariat at the Council of Europe for furnishing me with copies of appraisals and reports related to the Maritime Alps Nature Park;
- (d) The Mayor Giacomo Gaiotti and the ladies and gentlemen mentioned in the programme of my visit for their welcome; and last but not least.
- (e) Ranger James Beauchamp who was my consort, my driver, my information officer and at times my interpreter during my two-day visit.

13. CONCLUSION

As stated above, the Management and Administration of the Maritime Alps Nature Park were given the responsibility of running the Marguareis Nature Park as well as five other small, scattered reserves (Ciciu del Villar, Benevagienna, Crava Morozzo, Sorgenti del Belbo and Grotte di Bossea). It would be ideal if the two Natural Parks of Maritime and Marguareis would have a territorial continuity (they are already joined by the SCI IT 1160056 “Alpi Marittime”), and should be given the official status of a National Park, for which they already have all the characteristics to be classified as such. It is worth mentioning that the Maritime Alps Nature Park has already been classified category II by IUCN. Ciciu del Villar, Benevagienna, Crava Morozzo, Sorgenti del Belbo and Grotte di Bossea, the small, scattered reserves with very different characteristics creates considerable management difficulties. These reserves should be managed at a local level by Municipalities or the Province.

The trans-boundary work with the Mercantour National Park started 30 years ago resulting in considerable results with the formation of the EGTC (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation). It is fundamental to discuss a Maritime Mercantour International Park via an agreement between the two states, Italy and France. The two Parks should continue to work towards increasing integration. The conservation, tourism and sustainable mobility actions are very important as is the integration of the rules of conduct of the trans-boundary area.

It has been noted that the management and administration of the Maritime Alps Nature Park is seriously understaffed as well as not backed with an adequate budget. The number of activities and the large area to cover mean that the number of staff members (52 people as of 31/12/2016) is absolutely inadequate, particularly those dealing with maintenance, conservation and sustainable tourism. The Park is also suffering through a depleted yearly budget. It receives only € 500.000,00 for ordinary expenses. All of the resources are accrued from European Funding which only cover the on-going projects and do not cover ordinary running costs.

The Park is also involved in important international projects. The Large Carnivore Reference Centre is housed at the Park as well as the Germplasm Bank and Centre for Botanic Biodiversity. These two bodies manage projects extending over the whole of the Alps, but despite their esteemed role they do not have permanent staff and rely on temporary contracts thanks to European projects. It is of paramount importance to secure these offices with at least two permanent employees each. They collaborate at international level with universities in USA and other parts of the world and are a support to European bodies such as the European Commission’s Large Carnivore Group.

This on-the-spot visit has enabled me to verify the efficiency of the management and the excellent team spirit of the Park's Council, Director and staff, and the constructive collaboration between individuals with different backgrounds and interests in the Park, in spite of the most unfortunate situation of being highly understaffed and with a relatively low budget.

The undersigned has noted that the original conditions have been adhered to and the recommendations have been largely accomplished. I would like to reiterate that the Maritime Alps Nature Park has been consistent in doing its best in upholding and maintaining the standards of the reserve.

14. RECOMMENDATIONS

The undersigned have no hesitation in recommending the renewal of the European Diploma, with the following condition & recommendations attached:

14.1 Conditions

- (1) Alert immediately the Council of Europe Secretariat if similar projects related to hydroelectric power like those which have been abandoned, are again envisaged in future.
- (2) Request the authorities to secure an adequate annual budget and ensure a reasonable increase in the management and administration staff to be able to carry out all the necessary work related to maintenance, conservation and sustainable tourism.

14.2. Recommendations

- (1) Urge the authorities to officially recognise the two Natural Parks of Maritime and Marguareis as one National Park;
- (2) Pursue the idea that the small, scattered reserves (Ciciu del Villar, Benevagienna, Crava Morozzo, Sorgenti del Belbo and Grotte di Bossea) which have very different characteristics, should be managed at a local level by Municipalities or the Province.
- (3) Ascertain that the modification of the law L.R.19 29/06/2009 does not weaken any of the park conservation regulations or opening any door to speculations.
- (4) Continue the co-operation and the trans-boundary work with the Mercantour National Park and pursue the idea of setting up a Maritime Mercantour International Park to be agreed between the authorities of the two states, Italy and France, and to continue working towards increasing integration.