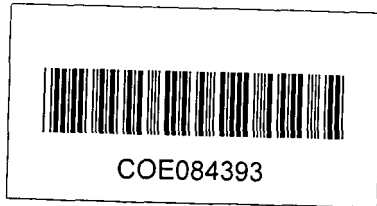


COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Strasbourg, 26 April 1972

Confidential
CE/Nat (72) 39



EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FOR THE CONSERVATION
OF NATURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Working Party on Flora, Fauna and Landscapes

EUROPEAN DIPLOMA

On-the-spot appraisal for renewal
of the European Diploma awarded to
the Abruzzi National Park

by Professor A. NOIRFALISE

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1. INTRODUCTION

Our visit to the Abruzzi National Park took place on 11 and 12 April 1972. We were accompanied by Mr. Hacourt (Council of Europe) and Mr. Bortolotti (National Parks Department, Rome). At the park, we met the authorities of the Ente Autonomo (responsible for managing the park): MM. PANEGROSSI (President), ANGERILLI (Regional Inspector of Forests), TASSI (Director) and ALAVENA (Deputy Director) as well as the municipal council of Pescasseroli, the Mayor Mr. TRULLO and his deputies. On 13 April a conference took place in Rome with Inspectors General LOBINA, ALLESSANDRINI and BENVENUTI. We sincerely thank all who so greatly facilitated our task and made documentation and information freely available to us.

We had already visited the park in 1970 at the request of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, which made it possible for us to concentrate on contentious questions. These derive essentially from the fact that, when the Park was created in 1923, it absorbed a number of communities with a total of about 6,000 inhabitants. Like everyone else, these country-dwellers wish to participate in the socio-economic development which has marked the past ten years and it would be unfair to criticise them for this. These circumstances have raised and will continue to raise new problems which the Park authorities cannot elude without failing in their duty. They also make it necessary to consider the management of the Park as a whole, and establish, as far as possible, a harmonious balance between conservation requirements and the villages' need for socio-economic development.

We believe it would be unfortunate, if not dangerous, to hold to excessively integrationist or stereo-typed concepts which would merely repress the inhabitants' aspirations to well-being; the inhabitants in fact found themselves absorbed into an exacting system of protection before they were in a position to assess the future obligations.

It is therefore, important that these problems should be accurately assessed both by those who have the heavy responsibility of stimulating, at local level, the broadest and most efficient consensus and co-operation possible and those members of the public who keep a critical watch on the evolution of the National Park, which has already achieved international renown.

2. LEGAL STATUS OF THE PARK

It is worthwhile recalling that the Abruzzi Park, created in 1923, is still governed by the legislative regulation of 7 March 1935. At that time, the regulation was designed essentially to make it possible to supervise the use made by the rural population of the forests and pasture land, with a view to ensuring the best possible protection for fauna, flora and natural beauty. The Forestry Department was then made responsible for the Park's management. In 1951 an independent administrative body was set up - the Ente Autonomo - under the

supervision of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests. This body was given responsibility for the organisation, administration and conservation of the Park and has to discuss all questions relating to "the protection and development of fauna, flora, geological formations and the promotion of tourism". It comprises four ministerial officers (Agriculture and Forests, Education and Scientific Research, Economic Affairs, Tourism), four local authority (local government) representatives and scientists. The Ente Autonomo has genuine independence and competence and its powers are exercised within the limits of the Park and in the context of existing laws and regulations. On the legal and institutional level, the Park's position seems solidly established.

However, the working conditions of the Ente Autonomo are made psychologically difficult by reason of the questions involved in the socio-economic advancement of the villages and the future of their agricultural administrative area. Most disputes, and in any event the most serious, relate to the narrow strip of the Sangro Valley bordering the Park and covering 5% of the total area. In that zone, the Ente Autonomo's vigilance is sometimes vigorously disputed by the local representatives; moreover, the nature conservation authorities criticise the Ente Autonomo for any obvious derogations from the strict principles of the status quo in that area, even when it is neither responsible for, nor agreeable to, them.

The placing of the Park under the responsibility of the "Legge paesistica e panoramica" (Ministry of Education) in 1965 has not put a stop to this contentious situation. Moreover we are not sure that the new basic law now being prepared, which will redefine the status of Italian national parks and the regulations governing their management, will do away with the existing disputes, as long as the problem of the socio-economic advancement of the villages has not been solved with the necessary wisdom, prudence and generosity.

3. STATE OF CONSERVATION OF THE PARK

We are able to confirm in 1972 the opinion expressed by Sir Hugh Elliot (IUCN) who visited the Park first in 1964 and again with us in 1970: no biological or aesthetic deterioration is to be noted except for the cases mentioned below. The populations of the larger animals have remained at the same level and the number of bears has perhaps increased. The types of vegetation and the geological particularities have undergone no visible change.

Considerable progress has been made since 1967 in the state of conservation. Two separate reserves of 600 ha and 900 ha respectively have been established by the purchase or renting of communal land. The development plan for the Park includes provision to extend these two reserves and negotiations are in

hand in this respect. The Claverlara State Forest which is situated outside but just opposite the Park (left bank of the Sangro) has been designated a reserve as it is frequented by bears from the neighbouring park. This step is the forerunner of the extension of the Park on the other bank of the Sangro.

Attempts to encroach on the Park area are those that were noted in 1970. Urbanisation projects affect chiefly the disputed area of agricultural land and particularly the Pescasseroli area. With the permission of the Ministry of Education, which is also responsible for the Park under the "Legge paesistica e panoramica", little groups of houses and villas have been built in the country round this village, on low hills on the less fertile land. These groups of houses are separated by agricultural land and they are scattered over an area of some 100 ha. Some larger buildings (blocks of flats) have been put up outside the Park perimeter, on the eastern heights overlooking the village. These developments, which are welcomed by the inhabitants of Pescasseroli as they create new jobs, have altered the exclusively rural character of the area which is, moreover, the least picturesque corner of the Park. Danger would arise if a concentration of secondary or principal residences were to form at the very door to a wildlife sanctuary.

In this respect, the municipal development plan which we saw in the municipal offices makes no provision for any further residential developments. That is why it is of the utmost importance to have this plan (binding on the municipality) legally confirmed as soon as possible.

The position is considerably less critical in the other areas of the Sangro. At Civitella Alfedena - the only other village within the Park boundaries but which is, fortunately, exceptionally picturesque, we noted two or three new buildings on the edge of the village; one of the roads serving it is also being redeveloped.

We are not personally, convinced that these innovations represent a serious threat to the larger animals in the Park which have for long been accustomed to the presence of man in the Sangro Valley. If the result is greater well-being for the inhabitants, and if the municipal plans are approved speedily to avoid disorganised urbanisation, an acceptable compromise would be achieved.

We think that two more serious threats have developed. The first preceded the award of the European Diploma: that was the building of a ski-lift terminal at the foot of the Pescasseroli hills. The facilities have been increased since 1967. It is now possible for skiers to cover the whole of the

mountainous area of the park, a maximum of 1,000 ha, (1/30th of the total area) during the mid-winter months. The 1970 map of the Park does not indicate that this zone is particularly frequented by bears. However this is an unfortunate encroachment and we can do no more here than note the declaration by the Mayor, Mr. Trullo, who feels that this installation might be abandoned and a similar, but more extensive one, created at the foot of Mount Marsicano.

The second important fact is the re-tracing, widening and macadamising of the Opi to Forca d'Acero road which bisects the Park at its narrowest point (4 km as the crow flies, but 8 km by the winding road). This road has been upgraded to "national highway" status which was the reason for improving it. It is the best link between the Sangro and the Sora (Latium) area but is dangerous when covered with snow. It has many beautiful view points and is likely to be an important tourist attraction. Biologists, whose opinion has not been followed and was perhaps not even asked for by the Highways Office (ANAS), fear that it may upset movements of the larger animals and expose them to accidents if the speed of vehicles is not strictly limited.

4. SUPERVISION AND MANAGEMENT

Considerable progress has been made in this connection since 1970 and the supervisory authorities, the Ente Autonomo and the Park directors are to be congratulated.

(1) The number of official wardens was increased from 8 to 20 in 1971 and their status is about to be brought into line with that of State officials. They are not satisfied with merely passive supervision, to judge by the number of offences noted and penalised by fines. Legal proceedings have been instituted for a number of more serious offences.

Moreover, the 40 rangers whose selection operations take place wholly or partly within the Park have been instructed in the Park regulations and may deal severely with offenders. The Park directors consider the supervisory arrangements satisfactory at present.

Courses were organised in 1971 and 1972 to train the wardens in biological observation.

(2) A park development plan was drawn up and published in 1971. It provides for an extension of the two separate reserves (Diffesa and Comosciara) which are two important sectors for wild animals; negotiations are already in hand in this connection for Monte Tranquillo. The plan also recommends enlarging the Park to include Monte Marsicano, a project to which the municipalities are, for the moment, hostile. The entire area of the Park would thus be increased by about one-third, from 30,000 ha. to + 40,000 ha.

(3) The administrative staff of the Park has been considerably increased since 1967. A director was recruited in 1969 and a Deputy Director with university training was appointed in 1971, together with a taxidermist, three office employees and a gardener. Temporary workmen are recruited according to requirements. Naturalists are invited to help the permanent staff in organising guided tours of the Park (schools, etc.).

(4) The administrative complex now comprises five buildings. In one of them an intelligently conceived museum is nearing completion; there is also a lecture hall. A small zoo is also being created. Excellent educational booklets are published for visitors, together with scientific and technical works. One building will be equipped as a laboratory, and bedrooms to house scientific courses are already available. The Ente Autonomo also maintains several mountain huts.

(5) The annual budget was increased from 75 to 125 million lire in 1970. To that should be added additional resources of some 25 million lire.

It is obvious that considerable progress has been made since 1967, and particularly since 1971. With its present equipment, the administrative complex will soon become a national, and perhaps even an international, scientific research centre for the Park and the entire Appenin chain.

5. PROTECTION OF THE PARK BOUNDARY

Until the Abruzzi National Park is extended its boundary is protected by a number of provisions.

(1) the "Legge paesistica e panoramica" applies to an area considerably larger than the Park itself and imposes restrictions to protect the countryside, large-scale development undertakings and residential zones; the latter require the prior authorisation of the Provincial Superintendents of the Ministry of Education.

(2) On 1 August 1970, the Ente Autonomo obtained legal confirmation by decree of the prohibition to hunt in a wide area round the Park which, in fact, trebles the area of protection of fauna. To compensate, the Ente Autonomo, accepts responsibility for damage to crops throughout the area. It must be agreed that this represents considerable progress in the protection system.

- (3) A Ministry of Agriculture circular of 25 June 1971 lays down conservation measures relating to reafforestation and private or communal woods, in connection with water systems, hygiene, landscaping and ecology. The purpose to which the wooded areas are to be put must be listed in the "Regulatory plans" drawn up by the Regional Forestry Inspectors. This regulation, which applies to the whole of Italy, obviously applies to the Park. In this respect it should be noted that the Inspector General concerned in the present case is a member of the Ente Autonomo and fully conversant with its aims.
- (4) The Forestry Department also assumes that when the basic law on nature conservation has been passed, it will be possible to apply a new concept of national parks to the Abruzzi National Park, including a system of concentric zoning: biological sanctuaries, peripheral protection zone and recreation and tourism zone. This procedure would give the present Park an appropriate, authoritative area of protection.

6. CONCLUSIONS

To conclude our examination, we should say that our visit to the Park has left us with the feeling that renewal of the European Diploma for the Abruzzi National Park is fully justified. We should have had rather more reservations in 1970, as the situation at that time seemed somewhat vague, either because this really was the case, or because we did not have time to go into all the complex aspects of the question. However, that may be, we no longer have any hesitation in strongly recommending renewal of the Diploma although we fully realise that problems still exist by reason of the Park dwellers' justified desire for improved well-being.

If the European Committee agrees, we should like to add a number of recommendations, not reservations, to our conclusions:

- (1) The question of grazing land should be studied in detail in connection with the Park's development as it has played a decisive role in forming the countryside and in the structure of the natural environment in which the fauna has remained at a good level.
- (2) The Highways Office (ANAS) should take account of the wish expressed by the Ente Autonomo to impose a speed limit on the Opi to Forca d'Arcero road, by means of suitable road signs.

- (3) The municipal authorities should agree to close to vehicular traffic some ten roads which go through the middle of the Park, and confirm their decision by municipal decree. Obviously this restriction should not apply to inhabitants who use these roads to reach their land. Some kind of pass might be issued to them.
- (4) It is highly important that the development plans which the Park municipalities are obliged by law to draw up, should be prepared, adopted and officially approved as early as possible and that the relevant procedure should be instituted without delay.