

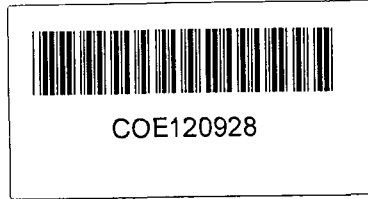
COUNCIL OF EUROPE

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EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FOR THE CONSERVATION
OF NATURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Committee of experts for the conservation of
wildlife and natural habitats

EUROPEAN NETWORK OF BIOGENETIC RESERVES
(Concept of the work : procedural and
institutional aspects)

Secretariat memorandum
prepared by
the Directorate of Environment
and Local Authorities

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for biogenetic reserves

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biogenetic reserves

AIM OF THE DOCUMENT

1. At its XVth Session, the European Committee for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources instructed its "Group of consultants - biogenetic reserves" to elaborate the procedural and institutional aspects of the network. The Secretariat then prepared the draft resolution set out in this document.
2. With a view to explaining the concept of this work, clearly and with more detail, the Secretariat also prepared an introductory text.
3. These two texts were examined and amended by the Group of consultants at their meeting on 20 and 21 June 1977.
4. The Secretariat believes that this document and Resolution (76) 17 should be issued as a brochure, thus grouping together the most important points of the work.

Background

The setting up of the European network of biogenetic reserves complies with the conclusions adopted by the participants at the first Ministerial Conference on the Environment, held in Vienna in 1973 under the auspices of the Council of Europe.

Recommendation n° 3 of Resolution n° 2 of those conclusions proposed that the Council of Europe should prepare a "programme for the establishment of a European network of reserves (including frontier areas where necessary) to conserve representative specimens of European flora, fauna and natural areas".

The Preamble to the Resolution states : "The wild flora and the natural areas constitute a vital factor in, and excellent indicators of, the biological balance of the natural environment, are of great scientific, cultural, recreational and economic importance for modern man and for future generations and also of great value in the preservation of the world's genetic resources, and must therefore be protected and managed as irreplaceable natural assets."

In 1975 a Group of experts of the European Committee for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources defined the general concepts and criteria which should govern such reserves. These were set down in Resolution (76) 17 on the European network of biogenetic reserves, adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in March 1976.

The Group subsequently worked out, in 1977, the rules for the network (the procedural and institutional aspects). These, after having been accepted by the European Committee, were the subject of Resolution (77) ..., adopted by the Committee of Ministers on

The term "biogenetic reserve" was chosen because, on the one hand, it indicated one of the major aims of the project, the conservation of the two main components of the biological environment, the wild flora and fauna, and, on the other hand, because it stressed the importance to man and his environment of plant and animal genetic material.

Summary of the project,

Under Resolution (76) 17, a State may designate as a biogenetic reserve, with a view to its inclusion in the European network, any protected area of land or sea, or part thereof, enjoying legal status and characterised by one or more typical, unique, endangered or rare habitats, biocenoses or ecosystems.

The area will become part of the network as soon as the Committee of Ministers, on a recommendation of the European Committee for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, has pronounced in favour of its inclusion. To this end, the Committee will make sure that the information given on the descriptive card for the area is compatible with the concepts, objectives and principles appearing in Resolution (76) 17. If it is not, the inclusion of the area in the network will be refused. In case of doubt, an on-the-spot survey may be made by an independent expert. There is no time-limit for inclusion, but exclusion may be decided upon where one or more of the objectives and/or principles of Resolution (76) 17 is not observed.

Legally, a biogenetic reserve retains its original status and denomination (e.g. nature reserve, national park, etc.); consequently its inclusion in the European network does not imply any modification to the national terminology for protected areas. Nonetheless, the general regulations governing the area should, if necessary, be strengthened so as to conform to the principles and objectives of Resolution (76) 17.

The adoption by the Committee of Ministers of Resolution (77) ... on the rules of the European network signifies official recognition by Governments of the European network of biogenetic reserves, that is to say its creation.

Objectives

The diversity, the genetic potential, the representativeness and the relative stability of the different types of habitats, biocenoses and ecosystems are the result of evolution covering several thousand years. Natural disasters were often the reason for the extinction of flora and fauna species and of whole biogeographical units; nevertheless such upheavals were rare and widely separated in time. Nature was able to adapt itself to the new conditions which encouraged the appearance of new species of flora and fauna.

Later, Man added to these natural disasters and put increased and frequently uncontrolled pressures on the natural environment, wasting more and more of the natural resources. Species of flora and fauna which could rapidly adapt to these new environmental conditions are few. As a result, the quality of our biological heritage has declined and it has lost its diversity. The biological equilibrium on our continent has been profoundly changed, the transformation of the environment being even more apparent because of the high population density. Apart from some alpine biotopes and the arctic, no natural biotopes untouched by man remain.

Although in Europe man has upset the biological balance, the number of plant and animal species which have become extinct in recent centuries is smaller than in other continents.

This is due partly to the fact that human intervention has been much slower there than in other parts of the world, especially Africa. Nevertheless, the present situation in Europe of fauna, flora and natural habitats, biocenoses and ecosystems seems to be reaching a critical point, as is shown by the studies carried out during the last few years by the European Committee :

- at least 30% of amphibian species (13 in all), 45% of reptiles (47 species), 12% of birds (59 species) and 12% of mammals (36 species) are threatened (in danger, rare or vulnerable) ;
- some 1,400 plant species are rare and/or endangered and more than 100 may soon become extinct ; this figure of 1,400 represents about 10% of all European flora ;
- the Mediterranean maquis, heathlands, hedgerow landscapes and wetlands are in immediate danger and their total number and area are constantly decreasing while erosion in the Mediterranean and Alpine regions is increasing.

The list of seriously damaged environments and threatened species may easily be lengthened.

As the biological heritage is of vital importance to all Europeans, from both the economic and the ecological viewpoints, it must be preserved. A European network of biogenetic reserves would contribute to attaining this objective ; it is therefore desirable that all Council of Europe member States and those States having observer status with the European Committee should take an active part in setting it up.

Governments should in particular propose the following types of protected areas, whose status and purpose are intended mainly to preserve the environment and conserve wild flora and fauna :

- areas under strict protection where the environment is still very close to that of nature ;
- areas in which traditional activities of Man are not predominant and those in which new activities are strictly controlled or even prohibited ;
- areas in which the biological balance is upset but could well be restored if managed according to ecological principles.

Other environments, not protected but of major interest to the network, should also be proposed, subject to Governments giving them protected status.

The network should include two kinds of biogenetic reserves :

- those of great extent (some thousands of hectares) comprising one or more ecosystems
- those of medium or even small size (a few dozen hectares) provided that they are ecologically viable.

Because of the aims and principles of the European network, it would be unrealistic to hope to include the whole of any one biogeographical unit.

As mentioned in Resolution (76) 17, ecological research is one of the main purposes of the network and must be encouraged. To begin with, use must be made of research programmes already being carried out and observations made in the biogenetic reserves and results should be communicated to all managers of reserves in the network. At a later stage, a joint programme should be implemented, especially in reserves having comparable aims and/or belonging to the same type of environment. The European Committee could play an important part in the preparation of such a programme. The descriptive card should be brought up to date every five years, making it necessary for managers to keep a continuous watch on their areas and to have available information on the flora, fauna, plant communities, different types of habitat, biocenose or ecosystem, etc.

The European network of biogenetic reserves will form an important part of the work done, both by the Council of Europe and by the member States, to inform and train the public.

Some UNESCO biosphere reserves (Programme MAB) could be included in the Council of Europe network of biogenetic reserves and vice versa.

DRAFT RESOLUTIONON RULES FOR THE EUROPEAN NETWORK OF BIOGENETIC RESERVES

THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

Having regard to the recommendation of the European Ministerial Conference on the Environment held in Vienna from 28 to 30 March 1973, concerning the preparation of "a programme for the establishment of a European network of reserves (including frontier areas, where necessary) to conserve representative examples of European flora, fauna and natural areas" (Resolution n° 2, point 3) ;

Considering its own Resolution (76) 17 of 15 March 1976 on the European network of biogenetic reserves, which defined the concepts, main objectives and principles of such protected areas ;

Adopts hereby the Rules for the European Network of Biogenetic Reserves, thus recognising officially the existence of the network.

OBJECTIVES AND PRINCIPLESArticle 1

1. Any protected area or part of such area, whether on land or sea, situated within the limits of national territory or across frontiers, which complies with the main objectives and the principles of the Committee of Ministers' Resolution (76) 17 may be included in the European network of biogenetic reserves (hereafter called the European network).
2. The principal objective of the European network shall be to guarantee the diversity, the genetic potential, the representativity and the relative stability of the various types of habitat, biocenosis and ecosystem of Europe.
3. The main principles governing a biogenetic reserve are as follows :
 - the legal status must ensure the long-term viability of the wild flora and fauna and of the natural environment of which they are part ;
 - the reserve must satisfy at least one of the following criteria : typical, unique, rare or endangered ;
 - the management must conform with ecological principles and help to maintain and conserve, and if necessary restore, the natural environment.

