

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

Siebengebirge/ Germany Nature Reserve

Name of the area: Siebengebirge Nature Reserve

Year and number of years since the award or renewal of the European Diploma of Protected Areas

Award 2024 **in July this year**

Certifications/ **Nature Reserve Area**

Designations **FHH-Area**

European Diploma of Protected Areas

National Geotope

Date of delivery **DEC 14, 2024**

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Introduction

On July 10, 2024, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe extended the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to the Siebengebirge nature reserve until September 21, 2031. The information about this extension reached the Siebengebirge Beautification Association VVS on July 22, 2024

The experts and thus the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe have not attached any conditions to the extension of the diploma, but have made nine recommendations which they advise those responsible for the Siebengebirge to examine and implement.

In view of the short period of time available to the various stakeholders in the protected area to plan or implement the steps resulting from the recommendations, this report on the recommendations can in many cases only present measures that are being considered, planned or have already been implemented.

1. Conditions

none

2. Recommendations

1. secure the financial sustainability of the conservation measures and the maintenance of the infrastructure in the nature reserve by agreements with donors at all administrative levels;

Follow-up financing/sustainability of important conservation and infrastructure measures, in particular the large-scale nature conservation project Chance7 (including a flock of migratory sheep with 420 sheep/goats), renaturation of ponds; scrub clearance measures with conversion into species-rich smooth oat meadows) are largely ensured.

2. keep the decision-making role of the Verschönerungsverein für das Siebengebirge within the management structure of the nature park;

The decision-making authority of the VVS in the nature park administration is guaranteed by large landholdings in the nature park and voting rights in the nature park administration.

3. monitor and analyse the results of the different reforestation methods for damaged spruce stands and use the most successful experiences to anticipate the effects of climate change;

The damage caused by bark beetles and drought has been countered by natural regeneration and, in particular, new planting (around 60,000 trees in the nature reserve). The various new plantings are to be monitored in order to determine their climate-adapted effectiveness/sustainability.

4. explore the possibility of building a wilderness exhibition centre at Margarethenhöhe and entrust the Verschönerungsverein für das Siebengebirge with the management of the central Margarethenhöhe parking spaces to ensure that parking fees remain allocated to nature protection, in addition to the significant volunteer work carried out by the Verschönerungsverein für das Siebengebirge;

The VVS is currently working on the extensive redesign of its previous exhibition (“Window to the Siebengebirge and Siebengebirge Wilderness Area”) in the cramped space of the VVS forester's lodge. As this exhibition is the only one in the entire nature park and nature conservation area, there are various plans to expand or build a new wilderness center in the forester's lodge area. However, the decision on this will be left to the newly elected board after the departure of the current management team in the fall of 2025.

5. further develop signposting and maintain trails to redirect visitors from the nature reserve to other areas of the nature park, in co-operation with the management of the nature park and local communities;

The so-called “Drachenfels Line” (Drachenburg-Drachenfels cog railroad) is the main attraction for visitors who are mainly adventure-oriented, especially as a result of the frequent TV shows “Bares für Rares” at Drachenburg Castle, while visitors who are more in touch with nature choose the central point of the Siebengebirge, the Margarethenhöhe, as the starting point for their hikes.

To decentralize the flow of visitors, the nature park administration and Tourismus Königswinter GmbH took considerable and, above all, successful steps in 2024. These include the creation of two new adventure trails for families in the eastern part of the SG, the establishment of 4 Kulturland loops, chapel trails of 3.5 - 11.7 km in length in the less frequented north, where the district savings bank has assumed the costs of clear signage. A hiking guide with themed trails including accompanying books, also outside the core zone of the Siebengebirge, was published and was very well received.

6. continue research and conservation projects, as well as nature monitoring that focus not only on Natura 2000 objectives but also on other groups, in particular fungi;

The research and especially the nature conservation projects of the two Biological Stations (Bonn and Rhein-Sieg-Kreis) and the federal project Chance7 are being continued- an application to the European Union for funding for wilderness monitoring and VVS activities in the Siebengebirge wilderness area is currently being prepared. An inventory of the mushroom populations is planned for 2025.

7. ensure that the existing open landscapes in the reserve are maintained and that a biotope network can be created, using appropriate measures;

In some areas of the Siebengebirge, labor-intensive and low-yielding viticulture has been abandoned. The increasing scrub encroachment of these landscapes, which are usually valuable in terms of nature conservation, is also associated with a loss of biodiversity, as some plant species are always particularly dominant during succession and thus displace many other plant species. In the Siebengebirge, both methods are used to keep the landscape open: grazing and mowing (orchards).

Now, open land areas in the Siebengebirge have not only lost area overall, but are being broken up into isolated individual parts. The remaining biotope islands are too small for many species, and their isolation makes it difficult for individuals to move between areas. In the coming years, the preservation of open landscapes and the creation of a biotope network will be one of the focal points of the work.

8. explore ways to acknowledge the contribution of private landowners to the management goals of the nature reserve;

The private forest owners in the Siebengebirge nature reserve were informed about the possibility of considering funding from the federal government/the state of NRW for the implementation of forestry measures. In particular, the rather low financial support with very strict conditions regarding the own management of these areas was discussed.

9. gradually replace the Council of Europe logo with the European Diploma logo in all information material and brochures, and explain the relevance of the diploma wherever appropriate, in particular on the website, in the visitors' centre and on information boards in the nature reserve.

The Tree of Life has been widely used as the logo of the European Diploma.

3. Site Management: List here any changes to the European Diploma holding site management, in relation to both terrestrial and aquatic environments (as appropriate), and in relation to staff and finances, since the last annual report was submitted to the Council of Europe. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

No new serious events have occurred with regard to terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems

The forest damage to spruce trees caused by bark beetles and drought in recent years has been almost completely repaired by replanting and natural regeneration

What concerns beech and oak, we have noticed that these tree species are also damaged, as it has become significantly warmer since 2014. The three extreme dry years of 2018, 2019 and 2021 led to dramatic changes in forest ecology and forest damage.

Noteworthy to mention is that to ensure the regeneration of the forests, venison is intensively hunted.

Spatial wind power planning was drawn up in the Cologne district government. The "Kasseler Heide" near the Siebengebirge nature reserve was named as a possible location. An analysis of possible effects is not currently available.

Intensified financial efforts will be necessary over the next few years to ensure that the major conservation project can be developed further (see Council of Europe recommendations)

4. Boundaries: Give details of any changes to the boundaries of the European Diploma holding site since the last annual report was submitted to the Council of Europe. If there are any changes, please attach an appropriate map to this report. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

The existing wilderness area in the Siebengebirge nature reserve was extended by 106 ha in the Bad Honnef area. So now the total wildernis area in the Siebengebirge now covers 930 ha

5. Other information: List here any other information about the European Diploma holding site which you consider should be provided to the Council of Europe.

The expensive rock stabilization work on the 800 year old Drachenfels Ruin was completed after several years (80m steel cables 40 m long plus anchors)

Additional hiking trails and cycle paths were created in the nature park (outside the Siebengebirge nature reserve) to equalize the flow of hikers in the Siebengebirge. These new offers have been accepted by the population and visitors.

At the general meeting of the Siebengebirge Nature Park, the VVS submitted an application for the appointment of rangers for the Siebengebirge nature reserve.

Königswinter Dec 12, 2024

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