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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE  
AND NATURAL HABITATS

**Standing Committee**

37<sup>th</sup> meeting  
Strasbourg, 5-8 December 2017

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**REPORT**

**ON THE SPOT EXPERT APPRAISAL OF THE  
ORDESA Y MONTE PERDIDO NATIONAL PARK (SPAIN)**

11-15 September 2016

*Document prepared  
by Mr Olivier Biber (Switzerland)*

## INTRODUCTION

The European Diploma of Protected Areas has been awarded to Ordesa y Monte Perdido National Park on 13 June 1988.

The last on the spot appraisal of the Park was paid by the expert Mr Charles Stauffer (France) on 6 and 7 August 2002 in view of the renewal of the Diploma in 2003. His report can be found in document PE-S-DE (2003) 13 of the Council of Europe.

Based on this report by Mr Charles Stauffer and his recommendation, based also on the annual reports by the Park's authorities, the Diploma was further renewed in 2008 by the Council of Ministers on 2 July 2008 (doc. T-PVS/DE (2008) 1. In their Resolution CM/ResDip(2008)13, the Committee of Ministers attached 5 recommendations to the renewal:

1. implement the national park's management plan in accordance with the land use and management plan (PRUG) drawn up in 2004 and Law No. 5/2007 of 3 April on the Network of National Parks;
2. finalise the feasibility study on moving the Pineta Valley municipal campsite and examine the available options;
3. pursue the scheme to make the Añisclo Canyon open to pedestrians;
4. in collaboration with the Pyrenees National Park (France), implement the co-operation measures set out in the Agreement on joint activities of the two national parks; and
5. study the proposal to extend the park and organise the consultation study.

## THE VISIT

### SUNDAY, 11<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER

Evening: Arrival at Huesca. Mr Manuel Montes Sánchez, Director of the National Park, and Mr Javier Rubio de Urquía, Senior Executive Adviser, Office of the Director of the National Parks Agency (OAPN) are welcoming me at the railway station. Transfer to Torla. Accommodation at the annexe facilities of the former Parador de Ordesa (former Visitors Centre of the National Park ).

### MONDAY, 12<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER

**09h30-11h00 Meeting with the Governing Board (Junta Rectora), the president of the Trust Board (Patronato) of the Ordesa and Monte Perdido National Park and the Head of the Natural Areas and Sustainable Development (Jefe de Servicio de Espacios Naturales y Desarrollo Sostenible)**

#### Participants:

- *Members of the Governing Board:*
  - Ms Sandra Ortega Bravo, Director General of Sustainability on behalf of Mr. Joaquín Olona Blasco (Minister of the Department of Rural Development and Sustainability of the Government of Aragon and President of the Governing Board) and on her own behalf
  - Mr Javier Rubio de Urquía, Senior Executive Adviser, Office of the Director of the National Parks Agency on behalf of Mr Basilio Rada Martínez (Director of the National Parks Agency)
  - Mr Manuel Montes Sánchez, Director of the National Park
  - Mr Enrique Campo Sanz, President of the Region of Sobrarbe (Presidente de la Comarca de Sobrarbe)
  - Mr Miguel Ángel Noguero Mur, Mayor of Bielsa, representing the municipalities (Alcalde de Bielsa)
- *and also:*
  - Mr Modesto Pascau Canales, President of the Trust Board (Presidente del Patronato)

- Mr David Guzmán Otano, Head of the Natural Areas and Sustainable Development
- *and also the staff of the National Park:*
  - Mr Luis Marquina, Public Use Team Leader
  - Mr Diego Navarro, Sustainable Development and Works Team Leader
  - Ms Elena Villagrassa, Conservation Team Leader

We discussed all recommendations and their fulfillment.

All stakeholders have been participating in the elaboration of the Land Use and Management Plan (PRUG). In general, they are mostly satisfied with the PRUG, although certain problems remain to be solved in a satisfactory way, like the extensive livestock activities (ganadería extensiva) and a better distribution of visitors on the whole area of the National Park as well as a more balanced development of tourism in the different communities. There is a provision in the PRUG for its periodic revision.

The camping site in Pineta has been abandoned, mainly because of poor infrastructural conditions. There are some needs of improving the access to the car park, but the sanitary installations have been restored and now there are new metallic anti vandal toilets and sinks. There is no need of new alternative camps sites.

For the time being, there is no need to develop the passage through the gorge of Añisclo. A minibus system could be envisaged provided positive economic perspectives. The existing safe viewpoints and visitors tracks are sufficient for visitors to enjoy the marvelous scenery.

There is a good cooperation with the French Pyrenees National Park.

The enlargement of the Ordesa y Monte Perdido National Park area is not a high priority. First, there is no necessity, there are no projects in the vicinity that could endanger the quality of the surroundings of the Park and any enlargement project would immediately pose the question of compensations for lost economic use, which anyway is not threatening the Park.

**11h30-13h00 Meeting with experts and stakeholders (all of them members of the Trust Board)  
(this meeting was envisaged for some members of the Trust Board: scientific sector, ecologists, landowners and mountaineers)**

**Participants:**

- Mr Modesto Pascau Canales, representative of the Aragonese Mountain Federation (representante de la Federación Aragonesa de Montaña) and President of the Trust Board
- Ms Paloma Ibarra Benlloch, Department of Geography and Territory (Departamento de Geografía y Ordenación del Territorio); University of Zaragoza
- Ms Begoña García, Superior Council for Scientific Research – Pyrenean Institute of Ecology (she is the deputy representative of Mr Juan Ignacio López Moreno)
- Mr Juan de la Riva Fernández, President of the Council for the Protection of Nature (Presidente del Consejo de Protección de la Naturaleza)
- Mr Mariano Polanco Cedenilla, member of Ecologists in Action (Ecologistas en Acción)
- Oscar Díaz, member of the Foundation for the Conservation of the Bearded Vulture (miembro de la Fundación para la Conservación del Quebrantahuesos)
- José Vicente Palacio, representative of the landowners (representante de los propietarios de terrenos particulares)
- *And also the representants of the management administrations*
  - Ms Sandra Ortega Bravo, Director General of Sustainability

- Mr Javier Rubio de Urquía. Senior Executive Adviser, Office of the Director of the National Parks Agency
- Mr David Guzmán Otano, Head of the Natural Areas and Sustainable Development
- Mr Manuel Montes Sánchez, Director of the National Park
- Mr Luis Marquina, Public Use Team Leader of the National Park
- Mr Diego Navarro, Sustainable Development and Works Team Leader of the National Park
- Ms Elena Villagrassa, Conservation Team Leader of the National Park

Again, there is general satisfaction with the PRUG and the way it is implemented. For conservationists, in particular also from the point of view of threatened wildlife, especially the Bearded Vulture, the increasing numbers of visitors to the Park could possibly cause problems. A study on the impact (possible disturbance) of visitors and possible solutions like a wider dispersion of tourists across the Park area could be envisaged. So far, at few days (4 in the current year) during peak tourist period, measures had to be taken to avoid too large numbers of visitors, limit having been fixed to entries to the Park. Each sector has its own simultaneous daily limit: 1800 for Ordesa sector; 650 for Añisclo sector; 325 for Escuaín sector; and 900 for Pineta sector. For example, for the Ordesa sector, it means that when 1800 bus tickets are sold, one stops selling until the buses return with passengers.

### **13h30-15h00 Lunch**

### **15h00-18h00 Hike into the National Park (Ordesa sector)**

The trails are well marked. There is easy access also for disabled people up to a certain point.

### **18h00 Hotel. Dinner.**

**TUESDAY, 13<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER**

### **08h30 Transport to Pineta Valley**

Again. This access to the Park is well defined. There is an visitors centre where good information is provided.

### **10h00-13h00 Meeting with stakeholders (livestock breeders) and a representative of the Pyrenees National Park (France) and short hike into the National Park (Pineta sector)**

#### **Participants:**

- *Livestock breeders:*
  - Mr. José Lorenzo Gistau Frechín, representative of the Ordesa and Monte Perdido Livestock Breeders Association; livestock breeder in Pineta sector (representante de la Asociación de Ganaderos de Ordesa y Monte Perdido; ganadero del sector Pineta)
  - Mr Feliciano Sesé, livestock breeder in Escuaín sector (ganadero de Escuaín)
  - Mr Gerardo Pañart, livestock breeder in Añisclo sector (ganadero de Añisclo)
- *And also:*
  - Mr Manuel Montes Sánchez, Director of the National Park
  - Mr Javier Rubio de Urquía. Senior Executive Adviser, Office of the Director of the National Parks Agency
  - Mr Luis Marquina, Public Use Team Leader of the National Park
  - Ms Elena Villagrassa, Conservation Team Leader of the National Park

➤ *Separately, there was a meeting with the Director of the Pyrenees National Park, who came with us to Pineta:*

- Mr. Gilles Perron, Director of the Pyrenees National Park

➤ *And also:*

- Mr Javier Rubio de Urquía. Senior Executive Adviser, Office of the Director of the National Parks Agency
- Mr Luis Marquina, Public Use Team Leader of the National Park
- Ms Elena Villagrassa, Conservation Team Leader of the National Park
- Mr Miguel Ángel Noguero Mur, Mayor of Bielsa

The carrying capacity is far from being reached within the Park. The livestock breeders face many problems: problems of access, free running dogs, lack of help from and support for an expensive and time-consuming activity. Payment for ecosystem services is a question. This form of extensive pastoralism is threatened by extinction.

I had a short but very interesting exchange of views with the director of the Parc National des Pyrénées, Gilles Perron. Also from his side, he was very satisfied with the good relationship and regular contacts between the two national parks.

**13h30-15h00 Lunch**

**15h00-16h00 Transport to Boltaña**

**16h00-17h30 Meeting with stakeholders (representatives of local entities)**

**Participants:**

- Mr Enrique Campo Sanz, President of the Region of Sobrarbe (Presidente de la Comarca de Sobrarbe)
- Mr Miguel Ángel Noguero Mur, Mayor of Bielsa
- Mr Miguel Villacampa Oliván, Mayor of Torla-Ordesa
- Mr José Manuel Bielsa Manzano, Mayor of Puértolas
- Mr Feliciano Sesé Cazcarra, Mayor of Tella-Sin
- Mr José Ramón Nerín, Councilor of Fanlo
- Ms Carmen Muro Gracia, Mayor of Broto.
- Mr Enrique Ramón Muro, representative of the Provincial Government (Deputación Provincial); Councilor of Torla-Ordesa

➤ *And also:*

- Mr Manuel Montes Sánchez, Director of the National Park
- Mr Javier Rubio de Urquía. Senior Executive Adviser, Office of the Director of the National Parks Agency
- Mr Luis Marquina, Public Use Team Leader of the National Park
- Ms Elena Villagrassa, Conservation Team Leader of the National Park

It is recognised that although not all visitors to the region also visit the National Park and although the season is short (2 months) most villages benefit or live from Park visitors; benefits go to the tertiary sector in the first place but considerably also to the primary sector. The improvement of access to the Park via different “entries” could be one recommendation.

**17h30 Transfer to Torla**

**18h00 Hotel. Dinner.**

## WEDNESDAY, 14<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER

**08h30 Transfer to Añisclo Canyon and tour vehicle along Añisclo way.**

The lower part of the Cañon is worth visiting for its fantastic scenery, but also for certain geological and botanical peculiarities. There is a danger of falling rocks and stones. There are several places, where to get out of the car and watch the scenery safely. There are also interesting and well explained information boards.

**11h30-13h00 Short hike into the circular itinerary of San Úrbez**

Safe trails lead you through the upper part of the Cañon with very interesting natural and cultural items. Again, interesting and well presented information is available for visitors. The car park right at the start of the trails is not very big (because of terrain constraints), but there are additional possibilities for parking cars in walking distance a little farther above.

**13h00 Transport to Nerín**

**13h30-15h00 Lunch**

**15h00-18h00 Transfer to Torla and then to Huesca**

**18h00-19h00 Conclusions meeting with the National Park staff**

**Participants:**

- Mr Javier Rubio de Urquía. Senior Executive Adviser, Office of the Director of the National Parks Agency
- Mr David Guzmán Otano, Head of the Natural Areas and Sustainable Development
- Mr Manuel Montes Sánchez, Director of the National Park
- Mr Luis Marquina, Public Use Team Leader of the National Park
- Mr Diego Navarro, Sustainable Development and Works Team Leader of the National Park
- Ms Elena Villagrasa, Conservation Team Leader of the National Park

**Recommendations from Resolution CM/ResDip(2008)13:**

1. Implement the management plan

This is being done with success

2. Finalise the feasibility study on moving the Pineta Valley municipal campsite

The campsite has been removed

3. Pursue the scheme to make the Añisclo Canyon open to pedestrians

The upper part of the Canyon is very well accessible for pedestrians with several trails and appropriate information. The possibility of a minibus ride through the lower part of the Canyon is being assessed in conjunction with the development of a new visitors' centre and car park at Escalona.

4. Collaboration with the Pyrenees National Park (France)

There is a regular collaboration with the French NP. There are a few points of incompatibility, e.g. the fact that dogs are allowed in the Spanish but forbidden in the French National Park. Access to the upper areas of the Ordesa sector is much easier from the French side, reason why it would be much better for the National Park Ordesa and Monte Perdido, that the Parc National des Pyrénées limit access by vehicle to Col de Tentes at a lower level. (This is a spanish wish but it is not a French will, because they consider they have lowered the level enough from Col de Bujaruelo to Col de Tentes. It's not enough for the Spanish Park administration)

##### 5. Study the proposal to extend the Park

For the time being there are no strong arguments neither in favour nor in opposition to an extension of the Park. If there was an extension of the Park, it would have to be accompanied by adequate measures of compensation for possible economic loss (like from agricultural use, logging, hunting and the like) and contribute appropriate means for the development of touristic infrastructure and employment (several mayors were of this view).

The PRUG contains many suggestions with respect to livestock breeding in the Park. It is clear that the maintenance of grazing by livestock is an important ecosystem service to large parts of the Park. On the other hand, livestock activities, subsidies and other supporting measures as well as the economics of this activity are ruled by other rules than the PRUG. Therefore, the appropriate ruling of pastoralism even inside the Park is not a matter for the implementation of the PRUG as such but has rather to be solved beyond it. This means that we cannot make a recommendation to the Park authorities but rather make an “annotation” that the problem should be looked at by the appropriate authorities. Certainly, extensive grazing by livestock in altitudinal pastures is an important ecological and cultural factor for the Park: extensive grazing by livestock is necessary to maintain pasture ecosystems in the Park.

Dogs are allowed in the Park, but they have to be held on leach. In this respect, there is obviously a certain lack of compliance. The recommendation should be to improve the information and awareness raising of people entering the Park; enforcement should also be thrived at through more surveillance within the Park. People should be made aware of the fact that they are not allowed to enter the French National Park with a dog, even on leach.

In order to better appreciate the carrying capacity of visitors, it could be recommended to conduct a study on the impact of visitors on flora and fauna, landscape and quality of the visit in certain sectors with high touristic pressure. At the same time, the efforts to create new access points with visitors centres (like the one foreseen at Escalona) and to improve the access and facilities at the car park at Pineta and also at Sarvisé-Puyarruego should be welcomed as measures to disperse the visitors, especially at times of high frequency.

**19h30                  Hotel. Dinner**

**THURSDAY, 15<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER**

**Morning: Departure**

**THANKS**

I am very grateful to the director of the Ordesa y Monte Perdido National Park, Manuel Montes Sanchez, and his very dedicated team, in particular, Luis Marquina, Diego Navarro and Elena Villagrasa, and also David Guzmán Otano, Head of the Natural Areas of Aragon including the National Park, who accompanied us during most of the visit, for a perfect organisation of the visit, their great hospitality and knowledgeable inputs. I also warmly thank Javier Rubio for his very valuable contribution and great help during the meetings (all interviews and meetings were held in Spanish) and interesting discussions in the margins of the meetings including during the travel by train back from Huesca to Madrid. I am very thankful to all the participants to the meetings for their very constructive inputs, their openness and their indulgence for my perfectible Spanish.

In spite of a heavy thunderstorm in the evening of the second day of the visit, we managed to visit almost all the places that were scheduled to be seen, especially all sites mentioned in the recommendations from the last on the spot appraisal in 2003.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Ordesa y Monte Perdido National Park and its surroundings is a fantastic site, very wisely managed and with a great potential for touristic development. There are no activities planned in the surroundings of the Park that could be considered as threatening the Park.

All the recommendations from the last resolution (Resolution CM/ResDip(2008)13) adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 2 July 2008 at the 1031<sup>st</sup> of the Ministers' Deputies have been taken into account and mostly resolved by the Park authorities.

## PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Pursue the management of the Park in accordance with the Land Use and Management Plan (PRUG) approved in 2015 and Law no. 30/2014 of 3 December on National Parks and the Royal Decree no. 389/2016 of 22 October 2016 by which the Master Plan of the National Parks Network has been approved; including the foreseen developments of visitors access at Pineta Valley and new visitors centre at Escalona as well as the fruitful collaboration with the Pyrenees National Park (France).
2. Improve the information and awareness raising of people entering the Park, thrive at enforcing the rule that dogs are only allowed in the Park if held on leach through more surveillance within the Park, and make people aware of the fact that they are not allowed to enter the French NP with a dog, even on leach.
3. Conduct a study, provided means are available, on the impact of visitors on flora and fauna, landscape and quality of the visit in certain sectors with high touristic pressure and assess the effect of promoting alternative access ways to the Park.

## Annotation

Awareness should be raised at appropriate levels outside the Park's management plan on the decreasing livestock activities within the Park that are threatening the maintenance and functionality of important pasture ecosystems from ecological and cultural points of view.

Olivier Biber, 15 January 2017