

Annual report 2020 on the European Diploma Area “Wurzacher Ried Nature Reserve”

30.11.2020

Reporting period: October 1, 2019 until September 30, 2020

Country: Germany

Name of the area: Wurzacher Ried (Fen) nature reserve

European Diploma extension: 2009 until 2019 (currently 10 years)

Competent Authority (central competent authority):

Ministry of the Environment, Climate Protection and the Energy Sector

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1. Conditions for the extension of the European Diploma

By 2021, revise the 2007 management plan or draft a new management framework meeting the provisions and objectives of the European Diploma for Protected Areas and complementary to the Natura 2000 management plan (in preparation).

➤ The conditions:

The new management plan (MaP) for the FFH and bird sanctuary “Wurzacher Ried und Rohrsee” was completed with effect from November 1, 2019. The management plan presents the occurrences of the habitat types and species of the Habitats Directive on a plot-by-plot basis and specifies the objectives and measures that must be taken to conserve these habitats and species and, where appropriate, to improve their condition and their development.

All previous maintenance and development measures in the Wurzacher Ried will be adjusted and further developed in line with the new findings.

2. Recommendations on the extension of the European Diploma

Recommendation 1:

Investigate the possible technical methods to connect the aquatic system of the Haidgauer high moor, separated by the trunk road B465, through water channels or other technical measures in order to enable more water flow towards the eastern part of the moor and to ensure water exchange, especially in the Randlagg.

➤ **Recommendation 1:**

The road section of the B 465 leading through the Wurzacher Ried was ranked number 5 in the list of the most important re-networking sections nationwide in the “State concept for re-networking roads in Baden-Wuerttemberg” of the Baden-Wuerttemberg Ministry of Transport in 2015. Against this background, Department 44 (Road Planning) of the Tübingen Regional Administrative Authority, in technical coordination with Department 56 (Nature Conservation and Landscape Management) commissioned a feasibility study to examine possible nature conservation improvements on this road section. In recent years, a wide variety of surveys and site investigations have been carried out to this end and relevant technical solutions have been examined. The final feasibility study with corresponding technical solution options has meanwhile been completed and forwarded to the Baden-Wuerttemberg Ministry of Transport to examine the subsequent course to be taken.

Recommendation 2:

Develop a precautionary concept on how to deal with invasive species, to be prepared in case of their appearance, according to EU Regulation 1143/2014.

➤ **Recommendation 2:**

For years now, the occurrence or presence of invasive species has been observed, and individual species such as Canadian goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis*), glandular balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*), Japanese knotweed (*Reynoutria japonica*) and giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) have been systematically managed by means of appropriate preventive measures. Thanks to this continuous observation, new occurrences can be quickly and specifically repressed or controlled. The distribution of neobiota (i.e. neophytes) in the area has so far been limited by the measures taken and their further spread has been largely controlled.

Communication with the local hunting community is also planned to promote the hunting of the invasive species of Nile goose, which are already present in the Wurzacher Ried, as well as the raccoon and the tanuki, where necessary.

Recommendation 3:

Pursue the efforts to create a view tower next to the Torfmuseum to provide an additional attraction in the area without disturbance of the ecosystem.

➤ **Recommendation 3:**

In the year under review, further progress was made in the effort to build an observation tower as part of the visitor guidance system at the Haidgauer Torfwerk. After a general consensus was reached among all the parties involved on the relevance of this project, the Bad Wurzach town council passed a fundamental planning resolution on 15.06.2020, commissioning the town administration as the developer to initiate the subsequent planning steps with a financial volume of around €1 million. In a first step of the process, planning offices were asked to develop a guiding principle for subsequent planning and to prepare a preliminary draft based on the principle. In its meeting on 19.10.2020, the town council decided on one of the submitted drafts and commissioned the town administration to initiate further planning with this architectural office in coordination with all the parties involved. It can therefore be assumed that the planned observation tower could be realised in the near future.

Recommendation 4:

In cooperation with the aeronautical authority, stop any unnecessary acrobatic flights over the Ried, as these have negative impacts on the site and especially the birdlife.

➤ **Recommendation 4:**

In a first step, negotiations between the nature conservation administration and the operator of a regional flight school, who is mainly responsible for aerobatics over the Wurzacher Ried, led to the flight activity being relocated to other areas. In the medium term, it is planned that the flight zone above the Wurzacher Ried will be relocated, thus providing a permanent solution to the problem.

Recommendation 5:

Resume negotiations with landowners in order to acquire land in the outlying areas – mainly near the village of Albers – to limit and further stop the deposition of substances harmful to the sensitive environment. In case of inconclusive results, long-term agreements should be negotiated to reduce depositions.

➤ **Recommendation 5:**

The land acquisition will be continued in accordance with the financial possibilities of the State of Baden-Wuerttemberg and the existing offers of private landowners. Currently, the acquisition of approx. 50 hectares of land from the city of Bad Wurzach, and the purchase of approx. 17 hectares of hillside land near Albers by the property management of the state are about to be completed. I. B. The transfer of the slopes at Albers into state ownership represents a positive conclusion of the long-term efforts by the state to take over these marginal areas, which are important for the nature reserve. This will enable the management of these areas (which are currently being intensively used) to be adapted in line with nature conservation requirements in the short term, thus achieving a significant improvement in the preservation and promotion of fen habitats and species of particular importance to nature conservation.

In addition, the exchange of approximately 6 hectares of privately owned farmland on the northern edge of the nature reserve with land ownership in the surrounding area is currently under consideration. This would allow these areas to be extended, which would further improve the overall situation.

Recommendation 6:

Preserve the integrity of the landscape around the Bad Wurzach Basin and avoid the construction of technical infrastructure on the hills and hilltops in the visual range of the Wurzacher Ried.

➤ **Recommendation 6:**

All the previous plans in this regard were successfully blocked. We are currently discussing an open-space photovoltaic plant (currently applied for) with the competent authorities. The plant will have an extended area of around 1.5 ha.

In the long term – and especially regarding the expansion of regenerative energies – a coordinated concept must be drawn up, in which appropriate potential and any possible impact on the landscape and the visual integrity of the Wurzach Basin are taken into account.

3. Area management

Maintenance and development measures

The measures defined in the maintenance and development plan (primarily mowing work in the moor meadows and rewetting procedures) were also further implemented in the current reporting year. In the care and development zone, mowing work in the context of contract nature conservation will continue to be carried out by local farmers (approx. 300 hectares with 35 local farmers). Around 15 hectares of moorland will be mowed with the state-owned mowing caterpillar. In addition, measures were taken in the year under review to safeguard and improve FFH habitat types (especially those of lime-rich fens).

An increase in peat moss growth can be seen in the rewetting areas, which indicates a corresponding regeneration of the body of peat. The shrubbery and afforestation of the fen has been significantly reduced by the wetting measures. The waterlogging activity of the beaver (*Castor fiber*), which immigrated here in 2000, supports this development and increases the diversity of habitats. The beaver population in the fen is still stable with 8-10 families.

In the year under review, the fourth breeding success of the crane (*Grus grus*) underlines the positive development of the biotope structures in the rewetting areas. This is still the only breeding site in all of Baden-Wuerttemberg. The renewed breeding success of the black stork (*Ciconia nigra*) in the area is also remarkable. An over-summering white-tailed eagle, as well as several observed snake eagles, underscore the importance of the Wurzacher Ried as a large wilderness area and as a habitat for endangered species.

One new animal is worthy of mention: a gold jackal (*Canis aureus*). It immigrated into the area during the reporting period and has regularly been captured by photo traps at the northern edge of the Ried since May of this year. The animal is male, confirmed by a DNA analysis of a solution found with a species tracking dog. This is the 3rd time a golden jackal has been observed in Baden-Wuerttemberg.

Natura 2000 management plan

In the year under review, the Regional Administrative Authority in Tübingen completed the faunistic and floristic surveys and the recording of the FFH habitat types for the development of a new "Natura 2000 management plan", which was finished and published in November 2019. This plan is an important working basis for all future maintenance and development measures.

The moor protection concept of the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg

The state government of Baden-Wuerttemberg pushed ahead with the objectives laid down in the state's concept for moorland protection. The aim of this concept is the medium to long-term renaturation of all regenerative high moors and the adaptation of land use to low moorland in terms of climate protection and the preservation of biological diversity. The Wurzacher Ried (Fen) is one of 6 pilot areas in the country in which research contracts for the further optimisation of the renaturation measures have been awarded to relevant specialist planning offices. In the period under review, further extensive hydrological data was collected in the Wurzacher Ried by means of a close-meshed measuring level network, with the aim of developing and implementing an appropriate catalogue of measures for the rewetting of degraded high moorland sites. In the year under review, data on various animal groups relevant to nature conservation was also collected, and this should serve as a basis for further planning, when taken together with data from the Natura 2000 management planning and other biotic studies. More planning and coordination steps are planned for the coming years.

Nature Conservation Centre Wurzacher Ried

The Nature Conservation Centre in Bad Wurzach is the main facility that manages the local care of the Wurzach Ried, the coordination of all care measures, public relations and (in particular) information for visitors. The heart of the centre is the innovatively designed

permanent exhibition “MOOR EXTREM”, which continues to enjoy great success and is an important element in the educational work of the Nature Conservation Centre.

The environmental education work and nature education projects of the centre were of course negatively influenced by the effects of the coronavirus pandemic during the reporting period. The structure had to be closed completely twice for several weeks as part of state-wide lockdowns, and planned events had to be cancelled completely in some cases or carried out under extremely restrictive safety and hygiene measures.

This has been clearly reflected in the number of visitors, which has almost been halved in contrast to “normal years” – and the centre has also suffered severe financial losses.

4. Borders of the area

There were no changes during the reporting period.

5. Further information

Public relations in the European Diploma areas

The official request of the Council of Europe to draw attention to the European Diploma with the logo in its public relations work on the European Diploma areas was fully complied with. The European Diploma with logo can meanwhile be found in all effective public media, such as the event programme booklet, the website of the nature conservation centre, info flyers and protected area signage. A separate station is dedicated to the European Diploma in the permanent exhibition of the Wurzacher Ried Information Centre.

The large information boards on the B 465 through the Wurzacher Ried will also be graphically renewed next year at the latest and provided with the current emblems and texts.