

**Resolution CM/ResDip(2008)1  
on the revised regulations for the European Diploma for Protected Areas**

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 20 February 2008  
at the 1018th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)<sup>1</sup>*

**Appendix 5: Model plan for annual reports**

**Annual report for the year 2024**

Annual reports should describe the changes that have taken place since the previous year in dynamic terms of management and function and not be limited to basic data. Any new text or map introducing a change in the situation of the area should be attached to the annual report.

State: The Netherlands

Name of the area: Oostvaardersplassen

Annual report for the year: 2024

Number of years since the award or renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas:

The European Diploma was renewed in 2021.

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<sup>1</sup> As amended by Resolution CM/ResDip(2014)2 on 2 July 2014 at the 1204th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies.  
Internet : <http://www.coe.int/cm>

**1. Conditions:** List here all conditions which were attached to the award or the renewal of the European Diploma. Explain either how the conditions have been totally complied with or detail the progress in complying with the conditions. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

the development and use of Lelystad Airport should not jeopardise any of the Natura 2000 targets or the quality of the De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve;

Regarding developments for Lelystad Airport, little has changed compared to previous reporting years. The basic flight level agreements over the Natura2000 area of the Oostvaardersplassen are still in place. The opening of the airport has once again been postponed. The government wants the discussion on (the opening of) the airport back on the agenda next year (2025).

**2. Recommendations:** List here all recommendations which were attached to the award or the renewal of the European Diploma. Explain either how the recommendations have been totally complied with or detail the progress in complying with the recommendations. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

1. closely monitor the effect of increasing flight activity at Lelystad Airport on birds, the achievement of the Natura 2000 goals, and the recreational interest and general tranquillity of the De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve core area and buffer zones;

There is no increased activity from Lelystad Airport. The airport is still not open to larger aircraft. So there is no monitoring data in this area. In addition it remains true that as reported in the last up-date the planned flying-routes have been established respecting the Natura 2000 requirements. This means that airplanes fly only at high altitudes over the Oostvaardersplassen and that the upward and downward movements occur outside the nature reserve.

**2. preserve the European interest and exemplary management of the De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve by ensuring appropriate management of the water dynamics, large herbivore dynamics and the grazing regime in order to achieve the Natura 2000 management goals;**

The new [Natura2000 management plan](#) for Oostvaardersplassen was adopted by Flevoland province in August 2024. For the management of the area, this broadly means a continuation of the previously initiated management measures under Natura2000, landscape variation, recreational zoning and the management of large herbivores in the area.

In the new Natura2000 management plan, the focus is still on the conservation targets (foraging and breeding areas) for the different bird species and how we can strengthen them with measures. One difference from the previous management plan is that the size of the numbers of large grazers has been assessed differently. Population management is considered necessary to achieve the natura2000 objectives and general biodiversity objective. Based on (vegetation) developments in the area and trends in bird numbers and carrying capacity, the numbers of large grazers will be adjusted.

One of the measures in the Natura2000 management plan and also included in the management plan for Oostvaardersplassen is the marsh reset initiated in 2020. This measure serves to restore the area of reed vegetation in the western part of the marsh. After the Grote Plas ('Big pond') dried up in 2021, it was found in 2024 that although hundreds of hectares of reed have grown back, at least one more year is needed to achieve the desired 500 hectares of reed growth. We therefore expect the water level in the western part to be allowed to rise again by mid-2025. The expansion of the area of dry reed beds will have a positive effect on bird species that are bound to this vegetation, such as the sedge warbler, bluethroat and Savi's warbler.

In previous reports, we mentioned the shelter realized for the large grazers in the area. The planting work has now been completed. With this, a total of about 150 hectares of shelter has been realized. Of course, the parkland will have to develop further to serve as full-scale shelter. This year we had to carry out maintenance work on the fencing around the enclosures. Poles were replaced in many places. It is as yet unpredictable when we will be able to remove the fencing so that these areas can again be accessible to the large grazers.

To enable fish migration from the surrounding area to the Oostvaardersplassen, a fish ladder was constructed in the Kitstocht in 2023. Following this passage, work has been carried out in recent years on a fish migration route that allows fish (think three-spined sticklebacks) to swim to higher spawning areas. In 2024, the excavation work for this route is finished. A second fish ladder was also installed in the core area and the Waterlanden (wet grasslands with deeper and shallower pools) were connected to the Lage Vaart (canal) outside the Oostvaardersplassen area.

During the preparation of this report, work is still ongoing in the Broeklanden, part of the grassy area of the Oostvaardersplassen on the Almere side.

Here, work is in progress to optimize the water level of the wet grasslands by raising low quays. The wet grasslands are an ideal foraging area for birds and habitat for insects.

In April 2023, the number of large grazers was reduced to the target number of 1,100, as set out in the Provincial Policy Framework, divided into 500 red deer and 600 heck cattle and konik horses. Counts taken in October and November of 2024 show that there are currently around 1100 red deer, 350 konik horses and 370 heck cattle living in the area. Thus coming winter we have to lower the number of red deer with 600 and the amount of heck cattle with 70. In summer/fall 2025 we will take out the surplus of horses (then supplemented with the natural growth of the herd).

### **3. envisage further extension of the reserve by creating a wide corridor to the Horsterwold, which would contribute to natural population dynamics and ecosystem management;**

As in previous years, a connection between Oostvaardersplassen and the Horsterwold (Oostvaarderswold) is no longer on the political agenda.

In the context of connecting Oostvaardersplassen with other nature reserves, the Oostvaardersoever project is relevant. This project aims to realise a 'wet' connection between the Oostvaardersplassen and the Markermeer. This involves exchanging water and fish between the two areas. The passability of the Oostvaardersdijk and the development of lee zones in the Markermeer to allow nutrient-rich water from the Oostvaardersplassen to settle are the main challenges in this project. Right now, the project (with a total budget of €110 million) is still in the planning phase and feasibility studies are being carried out.

### **4. maintain and further strengthen co-operation between the management authorities, the surrounding municipalities and the province in order to limit any impact on the De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve when reviewing urbanisation and zoning plans, and ensure sufficient buffer zones around the core area of the De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve;**

To relieve the core area (the Natura2000 area) of the Oostvaardersplassen from recreational pressure, agreements have been made with the municipality of Almere, the municipality of Lelystad and the Province of Flevoland in 2018 and 2019 to develop gateway areas of National Park Nieuw Land. We have made it clear from the outset that no space in these recreational zones will be used for urban development and housing. As such, the gate areas, surrounding forests, the Oostvaardersveld and Trekweg area form a natural buffer zone open to recreation around the Natura2000 area.

In the coming years there will be urban expansion from Lelystad. 'Zuiderhage', an agricultural area between the current urban area and the forest area Hollandse Hout, will be developed for housing. Although we have a clear boundary set for this expansion (the canal 'De Lage Dwarsvaart'), recreational pressure on the gateway area will increase. We are also cooperating with the municipality of Lelystad to create natural areas in the residential areas. By improving the walking and bicycle path structure in the Hollandse Hout, we can anticipate this gradual increase in visitor numbers. However, it is advisable to continue to monitor visitor flows and tighten zoning plans if necessary.

### **5. in co-operation with stakeholders at all levels (representatives of the local and regional authorities, managing authorities, scientists, non-governmental organisations and civil society associations), design a transparent and widely acceptable mechanism to control the populations of**

**large herbivore mammals; continue to raise awareness and inform the public at large about the objectives of such a mechanism, its direct effect on animal welfare and its long-term effect on the biodiversity of the De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve;**

The provincial policy framework for Oostvaardersplassen as in force from 2018 has been translated into a management plan with accompanying practical implementation protocols. The public has been consistently, frequently and transparently informed of the changed course in recent years. The relationship between reducing the number of large grazers (to a total of 1,100) and a positive development with regard to the number of bird species (and biodiversity) in the area is hereby consistently established and the first tentative results are noted.

In recent years we have increasingly noticed that the 'new policy' has been gradually accepted. In particular, changes in fauna management have attracted most attention in recent years. By 2023, we have a clear decrease in the focus on this theme. Birdlife and the projects we are working on are becoming more prominent. The area and its management are slowly becoming 'normal'. In spring 2023, we were able to indicate that task of reducing the number of large grazers to around 1,100 animals has been completed and that regular management is in place from now on. There are still individuals and small groups of people, who disagree with the current management, but this has long since ceased to have the proportions of the years 2018 and 2019.

Much effort has been put into informing the public over the past 6 years about the various measures taken in the area. This applies not only to the reduction and monitoring of the large grazers, but also all the other projects such as the marsh reset and the development of the gate areas. All available documents can be found on the Oostvaardersplassen website. The foresters' blog is well read and has a great spinoff to the mainstream media.

In addition to the above, it is worth noting that developments in the area and progress in implementing the management plan are being critically monitored by the provincial government. In April of 2024 it was indicated by the deputy that a scientific review will take place in the summer of 2025 on the implementation of the provincial policy framework for the Oostvaardersplassen.

**6. following the integration of the peripheral zones – Hollandse Hout, Oostvaardersveld, Kotterbos and Oostvaardersbos – into the De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve, finalise their management plans and ensure that they are consistent with the management of the core area of the De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve;**

As mentioned earlier, a new Natura 2000 management plan was adopted in 2024, which sets out, among other things, the relationships with the surrounding areas such as the Oostvaardersveld, the Trekweg area, the forest areas and the other areas of the Nieuw Land National Park. The ecological embedding of the Oostvaardersplassen in its environment is clearly described here.

We recently updated the zoning plan for the Oostvaardersplassen. This zoning plan was shared with our partners within the national park and indicates where we want to allow which recreational intensity in which areas. This includes, for example, the marsh area where we do not want to allow any recreation up to small areas in the gateway area 'Oostvaardersplassen Lelystad' where there is room for entrepreneurs who organize activities for visitors.

In 2024, the evaluation of the Oostvaardersveld management plan took place and a new management plan for the coming years was prepared. In order to meet the objectives for the area (herb-rich grassland and harrier foraging area), management will be adjusted and it has been proposed to use cattle grazing in addition to horses. A court ruling in September 2024 declared the Oostvaardersveld unsuitable for grazing. The court decided that the presence of large amounts of the indigenous greater burdock is not well compatible with the konik horses in the area. The plant's seed balls attach to the mane and can cause eye irritation. Because removal of the plant was not feasible in the short term, a large number of the horses were transferred to a grassland in the Lauwersmeer area. We are now preparing a management without grazing, at least for a few years, in order to diminish the amounts of greater burdock.

**7. Monitor the increase in numbers and the impact of visitors to avoid any negative effects either on the quality of the recreational experience or on the natural treasures of the De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve; take remedial measures if the results indicate negative effects on the intrinsic value of the De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve;**

For a number of years now, we have been able to use data collected by the respective municipalities on the number of visitors to (natural) areas. A distinction is made between forest areas and other publicly accessible areas such as De Driehoek and the Oostvaardersveld. This concerns anonymised GSM data. Although the data is indicative of the real number of visitors (not every visitor has a GSM with them or has

disabled position tracking), the trends are valuable in the increase or decrease of the number of visitors to certain areas.

For the number of excursions in the core area, we are limited as stipulated in the Natura2000 management plan. This prevents more than permitted pressure on the core area.

At the Visitors Centre in Lelystad and the Nature Experience Centre in Almere, door counters track the number of visitors.

With these forms of monitoring, we get reasonable insight into the recreational pressure on the different sub-areas. This data will be published in an annual report on Oostvaardersplassen in early January.

For the gate areas of the national park, we are already taking into account an increasing number of visitors and parking facilities have been expanded and trails are being upgraded.

**8. continue to reflect on the creation of the Nieuw Land National Park, encompassing the De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve, and consider applying for the European Diploma for this national park;**

There is energy from various partners on the further development of Nationaal Park Nieuw Land, of which Oostvaardersplassen, Markerwadden, Lepelaarplassen and Markermeer are the most important parts. There are no new developments on applying for the European Diploma for the whole national park.

**9. give more visibility to the European Diploma logo and raise awareness about its aims and objectives on the website of the De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve, through social media, flyers, brochures and information panels in visitors' centres and in the field.**

The logo is used on information and orientation signs within the Oostvaardersplassen area. As indicated in the previous report, the logo is not applied to signs and brochures where Nieuw Land National Park is the primary 'sender'.

**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.

On this question, it is fitting to review the plans that have existed and are being implemented for Oostvaardersplassen since 2018. These are eight measures that appear in the provincial policy framework for Oostvaardersplassen.

1. Reducing the number of grazers and maintaining a total spring population of 1,100. Last year we already wrote that the target number was reached in April and that from then on regular management should ensure that we can keep the spring population at 1100 animals. In 2024, we also entered the season with agreed number of large grazers again.

In late spring, a herd of heck cattle was briefly supplemented with hay due to wet conditions. Over the past five years, we have been able to gradually reduce supplementary feeding and in the winter of 2022/2023, we no longer had to bring hay into the area.

2. The swamp reset is still in progress. After this year's summer, it was decided to extend the 'dry fall period' by one year. Although the reed vegetation is gradually expanding and hundreds of hectares of reeds have been added, we have not yet reached the target of reclaiming at least 500 hectares of perennial reeds. It is estimated that from 2025 the water level will be gradually raised again.

3. Shelter in the core area. To provide shelter for the large grazers, shrubs and trees have been planted on an area of 150 ha. This aims to create a forest-meadow landscape of 300 ha where animals can find shelter and shade. In addition, this open forest landscape promotes the area's biodiversity. To allow the shrubs and trees to develop to full maturity, they are currently fenced off in exclosures. We will remove the fences again in a few years' time.

4. Water in the grassy part. Quays and dykes (embankments) in the landscape are currently being finalized to hold water in certain areas for longer in the dry part of Oostvaardersplassen. Currently, work is still in

progress in the part we call the Broeklanden. This completes the final phase and several hundred hectares of wet grasslands have been created. Areas that are particularly attractive to molting birds.

5. Poortgebied (gate area) Oostvaardersplassen Almere. In October 2024, the De Oostvaarders Nature Experience Centre reopened after a renovation period. The building directly adjacent to the Natura 2000 area, has been expanded with workspace, classrooms and catering. There is also a permanent exhibition on bird migration and processes in nature. The immediate surroundings of the centre have been redesigned with a new car park. The construction of a route for electric buses (eco-cars) through the Kotterbos towards the core area and a wildlife spot in the Kotterbos has been finished in November.

An improved mountain bike route through the Kotterbos will be completed in December 2024. The existing route will then have been modified to be accessible in winter.

6. Gate area Oostvaardersplassen Lelystad. According to plan, part of an existing cycle path in Hollandse Hout has been renewed and widened. Parking for 100 cars has been created at Buizerdweg. For horse riders, the existing bridleway has been extended by about 4 kilometres and parts have been sand-lined. The route was opened in spring 2024, with the agreement that work will still be done to solve some bottlenecks in the route.

Sand extraction in the southern part of the area Hollandse Hout South is nearing its end. In 2025, the last sand will be spread and the trench will be finished.

The other plans for the gate area, such as the construction of an elongated pond between the Buizerdweg, via the Torenvalktocht, ending at the level of the Visitor Centre will be implemented next year.

7. Recreation in the core area. Important milestones were achieved here in 2024. The “turning point” at the Waterlands (and place where eco-carts can turn during their excursions) has been decorated with a palisade wall with peepholes. As a result, birds and mammals experience less disturbance and visitors can see these animals better. An observation tower has been built at the northern tip of the Triangle. At a height of ten metres, one now has a view of the marshland and the lakes in the direction of Knardijk and Oostvaardersdijk.

8. The showcase area National Park New Land. 2024 has been working hard to find a partnership with nature-inclusive farmers to manage the 100 hectares grassland along the A6. Here the ecological objectives, herb- and fauna-rich grassland and harrier foraging area are leading. Currently, the area is already being grazed by a farmer's cattle, with the intention to consolidate the cooperation for a longer period next year, by signing a cooperation contract. In doing so, we are fulfilling the social desire to collaborate more with local farmers who have embedded the regeneration of nature in their business operations

In 2024, some changes occurred regarding the management team for Oostvaardersplassen. Incidentally, these are not structural changes, but incidental staff turnover. The vacant positions will be filled again in 2025.

Although the demand for additional funding for the management of recreational facilities (cycle paths, footpaths and the like) at the provincial level is increasing, we have not yet had to abolish or close any facilities in the Oostvaardersplassen. However, the fact that work is increasingly carried out by volunteers and staff from Binnenwerk (people with a distance to the labor market) does not mean that structural additional funding is not necessary any more.

Funding for part of the management and implementation of the additional measures in response to the provincial policy framework and the mandates resulting from it comes from the Province and other external grant sources.

**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.

No changes in boundaries.

**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.



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