

**Resolution CM/ResDip(2021)1
on the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to the Nature Reserve of
Oostvaardersplassen (Netherlands)**

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 7 July 2021
at the 1409th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)¹*

Appendix 5: Model plan for annual reports

Annual report for the year 2025

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

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

First award: 1999, latest renewal: 2021.

Central authority concerned:

Name: Staatsbosbeheer

Address: P.O. Box 2,
3800 AA Amersfoort NL

Tel: +31 (0)30 6926111

e-mail: w.wubben@staatsbosbeheer.nl

www: www.staatsbosbeheer.nl

Authority responsible for its management:

Name: Staatsbosbeheer Oostvaardersplassen

Address: Kitsweg 1, 8218 Lelystad, NL

Tel: +31 (320)254585

e-mail: w.wubben@staatsbosbeheer.nl he.kuypers@staatsbosbeheer.nl

www: www.oostvaardersplassen.nl

¹ 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;

Compared to the previous reporting year 2024, there has been a significant change in the ambitions surrounding Lelystad Airport. The Ministry of Defense has set its sights on the airport for the stationing of F35 fighter jets. At the time of writing this report, the final decision has not yet been made. This is expected later in December. It is possible that this decision will be combined with the one regarding holiday flights, although a majority of the House of Commons was against a “double decision” in September. Flevoland and the municipality of Lelystad are demanding both fighter jets and commercial aircraft. Whether there will be a combination depends on the new composition of the cabinet and which parties will be in charge. The ambitions of the Ministry of Defense take into account the Oostvaardersplassen as a Natura 2000 area, and if flights will be in the vicinity of the Oostvaardersplassen they will only take place high above the area. However, the arrival of the F35 is a cause for concern in relation to noise pollution, and we will continue to monitor these developments critically.

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;
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;
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;
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;
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 ;
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;
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;

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;
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.

1. 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. In 2025, work continued on the Natura 2000 measures that had already been initiated.

Large grazers

In the spring, the number of large grazers was reduced to the target number of 1,100 animals (500 red deer, 300 Konik horses and 300 Heck cattle).

Marsh reset

The “dry phase” of the marsh reset has been completed and more than 600 hectares of new reeds have grown back in the western part of the marsh (this part of the marsh is 2150 hectares). At the end of October, the weir was formally closed and the marsh can once again fill up with precipitation. This marks the end of a five-year period during which the water level was kept low and the reed vegetation was able to expand. The first results of the expansion of the common reed were visible and monitoring data showed an increase in bluethroats and reed warblers. With the rising water level, other wetland birds such as bitterns and water rails are also expected to increase in number. The annual report for the Oostvaardersplassen, to be published in January 2026, will briefly discuss the developments of the Natura 2000 birds in the area. (Photo 2)



Figure 1: The draining of the swamp allowed more than 600 hectares of reeds to grow

Water in the grassy area

In the summer of 2025, the final touches were made to the work to develop 200 hectares of wet grasslands on parts of the Oostvaardersplassen, such as the “Broeklanden” and the “Beemddlanden”. To this end, dykes were constructed adjacent to and parallel to the quay around the marsh area, allowing rainwater to be retained in a zone around the marsh. From autumn to late spring, the water will remain on the grasslands, creating an attractive foraging area for migratory birds.

Fish migration

Whereas we already constructed a fish ladder in the Kitstocht in 2023 to enable fish to migrate between the hinterland and the Oostvaardersplassen, the connection between the fish migration route and the wet grasslands will also be completed in 2025. Fish, such as the three-spined stickleback, can now also migrate within the Natura 2000 area and spawn in the shallow pools of the Waterlanden.

3. A connection between the Oostvaardersplassen and the Horsterwold was not on the political agenda in 2025 either. However, we remain committed to promoting vital connections between nature reserves.

4. The cooperation between Staatsbosbeheer (the Dutch Forestry Commission) on the one hand and the Province of Flevoland and the municipalities of Lelystad and Almere on the other is proceeding satisfactorily. At the administrative, civil service and implementation levels, the parties are working well together and share a common vision and commitment. In practice, this is clearly evident in the cooperation within Nieuw Land National Park and the development of gateway areas for recreation on the edges of the Oostvaardersplassen.

In October, the municipality of Almere and Staatsbosbeheer (the Dutch Forestry Commission) celebrated the official start of work in the Oostvaardersplassen Almere gateway area. Over the coming years, new footpaths, viewing points and educational facilities will be constructed in the edges of the Oostvaardersplassen, sub-area Oostvaardersbos.



Figure 2. Start of work in the Oostvaardersplassen Almere gate area

This is all part of the “zoning” within the Oostvaardersplassen, whereby the relative tranquility of the core area (the Natura 2000 area) must be preserved and visitors must be accommodated mainly in the peripheral areas.

In 2025, work also continued in the Oostvaardersplassen Lelystad gateway area on new footpaths, car parks and the construction of a new naturally shaped channel of approximately 4,5 km to connect the Buizerdweg with the Visitor Centre on Knardijk. The first contours of the new channel are now visible in the field and the banks of the existing channels have been cleared of vegetation.

The developments in this gateway area are being carried out in close collaboration with the municipality of Lelystad.

5. The management plan for the Oostvaardersplassen and the Natura 2000 plan for the Oostvaardersplassen explain the management of large grazers and how this relates to achieving the Natura 2000 objectives for the area.

These two plans were drawn up in collaboration and after consultation with various stakeholders and experts and form the basis for the management of the Oostvaardersplassen.

The policy for the management of large grazers was already established by the province in 2019, and we are now working with target numbers in practice. Animal welfare is guaranteed by protocols that describe the framework for action for herd managers and wildlife managers.

It is perhaps worth emphasizing that we have stricter controls in place during the winter period, with the condition of the animals being assessed by a veterinarian. When necessary, we feed the heck cattle by bringing hay into the area. In the last two years, this has not been necessary, as there has been enough food in the area throughout the year to keep the animals in good condition.

6. The peripheral areas, Oostvaardersbos, Kotterbos, Hollandse Hout and Oostvaardersveld, are included as sub-areas in the management plan for the Oostvaardersplassen. This makes these areas an integral part of the Oostvaardersplassen and forms an ecological unit.

7. For a number of years now, we have been monitoring the number of visitors to the peripheral areas (Oostvaardersveld, De Driehoek, Hollandse Hout, Uilenbos, Kotterbos and Oostvaardersbos) and our records also give us an overview of the number of visitors who visit the core area on excursions.

With regard to the number of excursions in the core area, we are limited to 500 vehicle movements per year (200 from Lelystad and 300 from Almere). Visitor numbers in the peripheral areas are gradually increasing. We are anticipating this increase in recreation in the peripheral areas by developing gateway areas with more recreational opportunities for visitors. The gateway areas thus form a zone around the core area where recreational pressure is concentrated, allowing the core area itself to be left undisturbed..

8. No steps have been taken to apply for a European Diploma for Nieuw Land National Park. This is not yet a topic of discussion for a relatively young partnership in which the partners have other priorities for cooperation. For example, increasingly intensive cooperation is being sought in the areas of marketing & communication and knowledge & research. At a later stage, it will be possible to investigate whether this cooperation can also apply to the European Diploma.

9. Last year, a Dutch delegation travelled to Spain for the 60th anniversary of the European Diploma. There, the importance of the diploma in a European context was emphasized once again. Staatsbosbeheer (the Dutch Forestry Commission) has also sought publicity internally for its areas to highlight this importance. In 2025, no information panels or other means of communication

appeared that should have featured the European Diploma logo. This will, of course, remain a focus of our attention.

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.

The management plan for the Oostvaardersplassen, published in 2020, is still in force. In 2025, further steps were taken to implement the “tasks” that had been set for the Oostvaardersplassen. In addition to the aforementioned developments for the marsh reset and wet grasslands, two natural pools (both around 1,5 hectares) were constructed in the “railway zone” this year. The work is now mainly focused on the peripheral zones and developments in the gateway areas.

Seven years after its introduction, the population management of large grazers has become standard practice and the debate about this policy has largely subsided. However, legal proceedings are still ongoing regarding the regulation of red deer numbers.

A contract has been signed between Staatsbosbeheer (the Dutch Forestry Commission) and a nature-inclusive farmer for the grassland (100 hectare) on Trekweg. Domesticated livestock should now make the area attractive to birds such as harriers.

In 2025, a review of the provincial policy framework took place. Have the tasks formulated in the policy framework been carried out? Wageningen University and Research (WUR) conducted this study on behalf of the province of Flevoland. At the time of writing this report, the final report is being prepared.

The management team has been back at full strength since April 2025 and there is now sufficient capacity in-house to carry out management work (or have it carried out).

Challenges arose in the form of combating giant hogweed. This invasive exotic species is difficult to remove and the plant takes up more space every year. A definitive solution for combating it has not yet been found and it remains a costly task to control the plant. However, the plant does not pose a threat to Natura 2000, as it is mainly found in peripheral areas.

In 2025, there was sufficient funding to carry out the necessary management work in the core area.

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

There have been no changes to the boundaries of the area.

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.

Seven years have passed since the change in policy for the Oostvaardersplassen in 2018. The changed management of the area and the animals has now become commonplace, and many annual measures can be considered regular management. The management team has coped well with these

changes and has mastered the new management methods, such as catching horses and building knowledge about social herds.

The following sections of the form should only be filled in if your area is in the year before a renewal of its European Diploma for Protected Areas, i.e. year 4 after the award of the European Diploma or year 9 after its renewal.

6. Natural heritage (general abiotic description: geomorphology, geology and hydrogeology, habitats, flora, fauna, landscape) – State of conservation

- 6.1. Environment: changes or deterioration in the environment, of natural or anthropic origin, accidental or permanent, actual or anticipated
- 6.2. Flora and vegetation: changes in the plant population and in the vegetational cover; presumed causes
- 6.3. Fauna: changes in the sedentary or migratory populations; congregating, egg-laying and breeding grounds

7. Cultural heritage and socio-economic context

- 7.1. Cultural heritage
 - 7.1.1. Changes concerning cultural heritage
- 7.2. Socio-economic context
 - 7.2.1. Changes concerning the socio-economic context

8. Education and scientific interest

- 8.1. Visitors – Information policy
 - 8.1.1. Arrangements for receiving and informing the public (building, booklets, maps, cards, etc.)
 - 8.1.2. Frequentation by visitors and behavior (number, distribution in time and space)
 - 8.1.3. Special visits (distinguished persons, groups, etc.)
- 8.2. Scientific research
 - 8.2.1. Current or completed research (observation, experimentation, etc.; identification or inventory of the species listed in the appendices to the Bern Convention, etc.)
 - 8.2.2. Scientific publications

9. Site description (vulnerability, protection status, ownership, documentation)

- 9.1. Changes in legislation or regulations
- 9.2. Changes in ownership title (conversion to public property, rentals, etc.)
- 9.3. Extension or transfer, new uses (for example, conversion into total reserve)

10. Site management (management plans, budget and personnel)

- 10.1. Improvements made
 - 10.1.1. Ecological action affecting the flora and biotopes; controls of fauna
 - 10.1.2. Protection against the elements (fire, water regime)
 - 10.1.3. Approaches and thoroughfares (paths, roads, car parks, signposting, fencing, etc.)
 - 10.1.4. Field equipment (hides and study facilities)
 - 10.1.5. Waste management
 - 10.1.6. Use of renewable energy systems
- 10.2. Management
 - 10.2.1. Administrative department: changes made
 - 10.2.2. Wardens' department: changes made
 - 10.2.3. Internal policing measures
 - 10.2.4. Infringement of regulations and damage; legal action

11. Influence of the award of the European Diploma for Protected Areas

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