



**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)¹*

Appendix 5: Model plan for annual reports

Annual report for the year 2021

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.

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¹ As amended by Resolution CM/ResDip(2014)2 on 2 July 2014 at the 1204th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies.
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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.

1. The development and use of the Lelystad Airport should not jeopardize any of the Natura 2000 targets and quality of the De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve;

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.

The decision on the opening of Lelystad Airport will be taken in the next cabinet term, a planned opening in 2021 therefore does not seem realistic.

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.

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

In July 2018, the Provincial Council of Flevoland adopted a new policy framework for the Oostvaardersplassen. This policy framework includes a large number of measures for an optimally functioning Oostvaardersplassen area and helped to formulate the management plan that was adopted by Staatsbosbeheer in the spring of 2020. This plan describes the tasks that we have for the area and the way they will be implemented through management processes. In short, the goals for which the area is managed include birds with particular attention to the task we have from Natura 2000, more landscape variation and biodiversity, and an improved experience.

The plan is based on a core zone, the Natura 2000 area, where nature and the Natura 2000 objectives are paramount, and around it a multifunctional shell of natural and recreational areas. Thanks to the clever zoning of these areas, the natural values in the core zone can be safeguarded and strengthened and the recreational content of the area can be found mainly in the peripheral zones.

The management plan is a 'living' document in which water management still has its place. Monitoring and (scientific) research, communication and environmental management have now been formulated. The management plan deals extensively with the regulation of the larger grazers. The focus is on recorded numbers of large grazers and the development of landscape and biodiversity.

One of the Natura 2000 measures, the marsh reset, is being implemented. In September 2021, the lowest water level was reached in the western part of the marshland. This level will be maintained in the coming years with the aim of restoring and expanding the reed vegetation by 500 ha.

Last year, a start was made with the realisation of a fish migration route with fish passages for three-spined sticklebacks from the Lage Vaart through the grassy part of the Oostvaardersplassen to the Waterlanden. Since this spring, the contours of the route have been visible and existing ditches and pools are being connected. This work is expected to take another year or two.

The reduction of the number of large grazers in accordance with the management plan for Oostvaardersplassen also continued in 2021. A number of horses have been transferred to two nature reserves in Denmark.

In addition, approximately 150 konik horses were taken away for slaughter.

The reduction of red deer has resumed in November 2021. The task of reducing the number to the target stock of 500 animals will take the next two years.

Last year, a start was also made on reducing the number of heck cattle.

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

Previous reports have indicated that the buffer zone between the Oostvaardersplassen and the Horsterwold woodlands via the Oostvaarderswold is not a topic that is currently on the political agenda. However, the buffer zone has been included as a theme in the election programmes of various political parties. In this context, it remains a theme that requires attention. The policy framework for the Oostvaardersplassen specifies that no irreversible spatial interventions should be carried out that stand in the way of a future connection. The option to connect Horsterwold and the Oostvaardersplassen therefore remains possible. In the current conditions and with the existing space in the Oostvaardersplassen, the policy framework focuses on reducing the numbers of large grazers to a total that fits the area and brings the objectives for landscape variation and enhanced biodiversity closer.

4. closely monitor the effects 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;

Given the fact that Lelystad Airport has not yet opened and that there are therefore no additional flight movements compared to the current use (recreational flights), monitoring is not yet an issue. However, a monitoring programme will be drawn up in preparation for the opening of the airport, examining the effects on Natura 2000 targets and on bird life as a result of the number of flight movements. The expected increase in the number of visitors and the effects on the tranquillity of the Natura 2000 area will be monitored through an existing monitoring programme. For this purpose, various nature checks were carried out and the number of recreational movements in the core zone was established by means of permits.

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

The collaboration between Staatsbosbeheer and the municipalities of Lelystad and Almere is reflected in the development of two gateway areas for the Nieuw Land National Park: Oostvaardersplassen Lelystad and Oostvaardersplassen Almere respectively. These gateway areas include the Hollandse Hout woodland on the Lelystad side of the Oostvaardersplassen, and the Kotterbos and Oostvaardersbos woods on the Almere side. These areas are part of the peripheral zone of the Oostvaardersplassen and are not part of the Natura 2000 area. In order to minimise the recreational impact on the core zone, when developing the National Park it was decided to accommodate more visitors in the gateway areas. To this end, these gateway areas will be equipped with an improved recreational infrastructure and an independent programming of excursions and activities will be drawn up and implemented for these areas.

There is regular coordination with the Province of Flevoland at various levels and on different topics. This involves coordinating the implementation of the policy framework in a broad sense and collaboration within the Nieuw Land National Park, which also involves 7 other partners.

The buffer zones around the core zone (Hollandse Hout, Oostvaardersveld, Trekweg area, the Kotterbos and the Oostvaardersbos) are included in a zoning plan for the entire Oostvaardersplassen area. This zoning plan indicates, which level of recreational intensity is desirable, and where. The urban development of Lelystad and Almere will take place outside these buffer zones.

6. in co-operation with stakeholders at all levels (representatives of the local and regional authorities, managing authorities, scientists, NGOs 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, about its direct effect on animal welfare, and about its long-term effect on the biodiversity of the nature reserve;

The management plan for the Oostvaardersplassen, as an elaboration for its overall management, is a practical translation of the democratically established Provincial policy framework based on the recommendations of the Van Geel Commission. The recommendations were drawn up on the basis of a broad

public consultation, in which many different stakeholders were heard. Scientists, field managers, concerned citizens and various organisations were consulted and the study resulted in a socially supported, integrated policy advice. In its recommendations, the advisory commission also included the regulation of the large grazers in the Oostvaardersplassen, and their recommendations were adopted by the Provincial Council and laid down in the policy framework. The management plan for the Oostvaardersplassen further elaborated on how the overall management will be implemented in accordance with this policy framework. This is based on a reduction of the large grazers to a total of 1,100 animals (500 Red Deer, 300 Konik horses and 300 Heck cattle). In addition, the management plan also indicates how animal welfare will be guaranteed. Since 2018, this new policy with regard to the management of large grazers has been widely publicised via social and other media, blogs and newsletters. In recent years, several meetings have been organised to inform stakeholders about the changed management. The regulation of the number of large grazers by means of active management is always placed within the context of the broad objective for the Oostvaardersplassen, namely the protection of bird life and the enhancement of biodiversity by reinforcing the landscape variation in the area.

The communication relating to management and its day-to-day implementation is a permanent focal topic and is put into practice by blogging about all aspects of management and ongoing projects. The task of informing the general public about the management of the Oostvaardersplassen has been elaborated in a strategic communication plan, which is included in the management plan. This is currently being implemented by a team of wardens and communication staff of Staatsbosbeheer and collaboration is being sought with the communication staff of the surrounding municipalities and the Province of Flevoland.

It is still too early to determine the effects of the implementation of the new communication strategy (from 2019 onwards), but there are indications that the social concerns regarding the management of the large grazers has decreased. The protest groups that became active in the winter of 2017/2018 have become smaller and the posts on social media have decreased significantly in number. Despite the fact that there is still opposition to the new policy from various parties, there is certainly the impression that the 'general public' has accepted and also supported the new policy.

7. following the integration of the peripheral zones – Hollandse Hout, Oostvaardersveld, Kotterbos and Oostvaardersbos – into the nature reserve, finalise their management plans and ensure that they are consistent with the management of the core area of the nature reserve;

The management plan for the Oostvaardersplassen will be supplemented by the management plans for the areas in the peripheral zones. A revision of the management plan for the Oostvaardersveld and a new management plan for the Trekweg area are currently under way. As part of the gateway development for the Nieuw Land National Park, new area and management plans will be drawn up for the Kotterbos, Oostvaardersbos and the Hollandse Hout woodlands. These area development and management plans will be included in the management plan for the Oostvaardersplassen and thus form an integral implementation agenda for the management of the entire area.

8. monitor the increase in numbers and 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 nature reserve;

The monitoring of visitor numbers was carried out in 2019 in a study by the Netherlands Board of Tourism and Conventions (NBTC) on behalf of the Province of Flevoland / Nieuw Land National Park. This concerns the number of visitors in different areas of the Oostvaardersplassen.

For the core zone (Natura 2000 area), the number of visitors and the number of excursions are recorded in a logbook. The permits issued are decisive in establishing the maximum excursion numbers and vehicle movements in the area, and the disturbance caused by recreation remains within the specified limits. Developments in the gateway areas and other areas in the peripheral zone will, if necessary, be subject to permit applications and will be accommodated within the existing permits. This ensures that the activities that disturb nature are limited.

9. pursue reflection about the creation of the Nieuw Land National Park, encompassing the De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve, and consider applying for the European Diploma for the national park;

The Oostvaardersplassen is part of the Nieuw Land National Park, an area of 28,000 ha, consisting of the Markerwadden, Lepelaarplassen, Markermeer and Oostvaardersplassen nature reserves.

The sub-areas all have core Natura 2000 status and, together, form a vast wetland with terrestrial sections transition areas / marsh areas and open water. Together, the areas have had National Park status since October 2018. They work together and contribute to the marketing and communication for the entire park and a joint research programme has also been drawn up. In addition, plans are being made for an umbrella education and activity programme, and the management of the park is being shaped by the various terrain management organisations and authorities.

In the context of the National Park, collaboration is still relatively new, and the goal is to form a shared identity alongside the area's own identity and organisation. The specific individual character of the area, with its different management forms and organisational objectives, does not always make this task easy.

The application for a European Diploma for the entire Nieuw Land National Park is certainly desirable, but not yet realistic at this moment. This requires a few more years of collaboration within the National Park, whereby policy and management will be even better coordinated.

10. give more visibility to the European Diploma logo and raise awareness about its aims and objectives on the website of the nature reserve, through social media, flyers, brochures and information panels in the visitors' centres and in the field.

The use of the logo on brochures and signs will be included in the development of communication tools.

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 new policy framework for the Oostvaardersplassen has been in force since July 2018.

The last report dealt in greater depth with the tasks arising from this policy framework. An update per task follows here:

1. A reduction in the Large Grazers. In the short term, reducing the number to 1,100 animals. In the longer term, the numbers may increase to 1,500 again, after which, based on the monitoring of the vegetation, it will be determined whether the numbers may increase or decrease. The most important change here is that the numbers are regulated.
Last winter, the task of reducing the number of large grazers was implemented. The aim is to come to a number of 1,100 animals (500 Red Deer, 300 Konik horses and 300 Heck cattle). Since November of last year, a number of Red Deer and Heck cattle have been culled. A group of 150 Konik horses has been caught.
2. Measures in the context of Natura 2000 objectives must be implemented. A start was made with the marshland reset of the western part of the marsh. In the last 2 years, the water level has been lowered successively in order to allow the marsh vegetation to be restored and expanded.
In the following three years, the water level can be raised again and a dynamic water level will be maintained.
The barrier between the eastern and western parts of the marsh was restored last year. This makes it possible to regulate the water levels in both sections independently of each other, so that a lowering of the water level in the western section does not affect the eastern section. This eastern part serves as a refuge for the birds and other animals that temporarily cannot find a suitable habitat in the western part.
3. In the grassy part of the Oostvaardersplassen, 500 hectares of wet nature will be created. This means that in addition to the already existing 300 ha of floodplain grasslands, 200 hectares of water areas and floodplain grasslands will be added to the area. This in order to be able to achieve an optimal foraging area for birds.
Last year, a start was made with digging deeper pools in the Waterlands. By restoring the dikes around the Waterlands, this area now has an enormous attraction for migratory birds (waders and water birds) as an inundation grassland.
4. The construction of fish ladders in and around the core zone will support the migration of sticklebacks, which in turn will serve as food for herons and spoonbills.

Last year, a start was also made on the fish migration route through the grassy part of the Oostvaardersplassen. Due to the wet weather conditions, work was stopped in the autumn and, weather permitting, will be resumed after the breeding season. As part of this fish migration route, fish passages will be installed at two places and the Lage Vaart canal will eventually be connected to the Waterlands (probably in the year 2022). During the spawning period in spring, sticklebacks are enticed by a lure stream to swim along the Kitstocht and eventually deposit their eggs in the Waterlands.

5. The construction of 300 ha of shelter area for the large grazers in the core area (and hence, in the long term, the disconnection of the peripheral areas from the core area as winter shelters). Last winter, the planting of 150 ha of shrubs and trees in fenced areas on the Stort and in De Driehoek has started. In the triangle, a dozen enclosures have been created, ranging in size from 100 m² to 5000 m², and shrubs and trees such as oak, birch and alder have been planted. In addition, several hundred solitary trees with individual tree protectors have been planted in the area. The wooded landscape is already clearly taking shape here. A number of enclosures, varying in size from a few hectares to 30 hectares, have been planted in the core zone. These planting activities will be continued in the coming planting season.

All measures resulting from the new policy framework are described in the management plan for the Oostvaardersplassen. This management plan is a guide for the management and the practical implementation of the activities. It is a 'living' document that will soon include the management plans for the peripheral areas and will also include the water management for the Oostvaardersplassen. There have been no major changes in the management team. The activities and management now mainly focus on the implementation of the aforementioned projects and their continuation as set out in the management plan.

The communication strategy as adopted in 2019 has been worked out in practice and implemented. The public is kept informed through weekly blogs and periodical newsletters about all the activities (projects, management and events) that take place within the boundaries of the Oostvaardersplassen area. Developments in the gateway areas of Oostvaardersplassen Almere and Oostvaardersplassen Lelystad are progressing steadily. Separate management teams (project teams) have been installed for both areas. They take care of both the planning and implementation of the area-based approach in terms of site planning and programming. Staatsbosbeheer is working together with the municipalities and the province of Flevoland in this.

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.

Since the last report there have been no changes in the boundaries of the Oostvaardersplassen area.