

**Resolution CM/ResDip(2018)9
on the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected areas awarded to the national parc of Central Balkan (Bulgaria)**

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 4 July 2018
at the 1321th 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: Bulgaria

Name of the area: Central Balkan National Park

Year and number of years since the award or renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas:
8

Central authority concerned:

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Authority responsible for its management:

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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.
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.

N/A

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. implement the new management plan and in particular control the protective measures for the different zones; after five years, make a comprehensive, mid-term assessment and revise the relevant parts of the plan as appropriate;

The second management plan of Central Balkan National Park (CBNP) came into force on the 5th of April 2016 and will be valid until 2025 (according to the Ordinance for the development of protected areas' management plans they are updated every 10 years). A mid-term evaluation of implementation was expected in 2020 but postponed due to the Covid-19 crisis situation. The evaluation was held in 2021 when comprehensive report for the prolonged period from the official end of the previous Management Plan (2001 – 2010) up to the beginning of the year 2021 was published and then public discussion for the different groups of stakeholders was organized. The process of updating the Management Plan did not begin in 2025. According to Art. 4 of the Regulation on development of management plans for protected areas, the current plan will be valid until the adoption of a new one.

2. take measures to better control poaching in the park and implement as soon as possible the strategic guidelines for the development of the security and control in the Central Balkan National Park, which includes a section on the prevention of poaching. In particular, strictly limit road development and systematically control road usage;

The control of the compliance with regimes and norms in the national park is the main task of the park administration. This include also monitoring and preventing poaching of any kind, as well as any other activities negatively affecting biological diversity in the protected area. Rangers' department is the largest one in the Directorate structure – 46 employees and six vacancies (out of 73 in the whole administration). This department is directly committed to observing the regimes and norms. The strategic guidelines for the development of guarding and control in the Central Balkan National Park are developed within the framework of a project financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) through the Operational Program Environment (OPE) (programming period 2007 – 2013). Much of the recommendations and guidelines in it are carried out by the Rangers' Departments. In 2025, the ranger departments continued to be provided with high-tech equipment in accordance with the recommendations of the guidelines. Night vision kits and thermal cameras, two new drones, new additional firefighting equipment and protective clothing were also delivered. In 2025, the expected procedure for purchasing new off-road vehicles for the needs of the Park's security did not start. The current fleet is highly depreciated and there is a shortage of vehicles in some park areas. A solution to the problem is expected in 2026 with a new public procurement procedure by the Ministry of Environment and Water.

In 2025 several massive and sudden inspections in the park territory was conducted for prevention of poaching and treasure hunting. Four very successful actions with wide public response were implemented, in which motocross bikes, long-barreled weapons and night vision devices, and other equipment were seized.

3. maintain strict control on grazing permits and prohibit any increase of grazing animals; maintain the pressure to reduce grazing by horses, which are much more difficult to control, and increase the number of water sources and their access;

Every year, the Park Directorate spends enormous administrative and human capacity to control the most significant use of natural resources in the park – the livestock grazing. In the last eight years, the Annual plan for grazing and hay using in Central Balkan NP has not changed significantly. After the major change in 2024 that was imposed from the Ministry of Environment and Water and Ministry of Agriculture and was related with norms of loading of pasturelands in all Natura 2000 sites with habitats that are maintained with livestock grazing, in 2025 additional limit was set. The direct payments for implementation of agro-environmental interventions are available only for pastures that not exceed 1500 masl. These norms are not against the regulations in the Management plan of CBNP. The pasturelands are still limited on 15 000 ha from total 16 700 ha pasture areas like the all years since 2022, but the number of animals in 2024 and 2025 is lower due to the new restrictive norms of loading. The framework of the administrative procedure for applying, permitting, distributing and controlling the use of the pastures in the park is preserved. For the eight consecutive year the precision of the processing of the documents has been in practice to 100% correct declaration of available livestock (in application forms) and to approx. 95% correct tracking of the grazing process during the pasture season by compiling of the necessary protocols in time. In 2017 had expired the last agro-environmental commitments of horse owners which had started in the previous programming period 2007 – 2013. Therefore, since 2018, there are no longer any horse owners supported by an agri-environmental measure.

4. set up comprehensive monitoring of the impact of grazing; in general, allocate the necessary funding for more management-oriented scientific research and studies;

Thanks to targeted funding from the Ministry of Environment and Water and for precise evaluation of the pasture resources Park Directorate at the end of 2023 contracted Team of scientists from Bulgarian Academy of Science, Institute for Biodiversity and ecosystem research. The contract aimed with external expert assistance to expand the scope of the monitoring scheme in pasturelands that was developed in the period 2020 – 2022 under a project financed by the ERDF under the OPE. Within this project measures to protect and restore habitats throughout the park were implemented in the years up to 2023 and methodology for the annual assessment of natural habitats subject to livestock grazing was created. Under this new contract for external expert assistance in the field season of 2024 to all pasture regions in the CBNP was applied the methodology and they were studied for quality and quantity characteristics and changes in the habitats that are subject to grazing. In 2025 again the same scientific team was contracted and the sample plots from 2024 were re-examined. These efforts help to the Park Directorate expert department to make the compulsory annual evaluation of the pasture resources. Within the procedure for actualization of the Management plan the information of these supported from scientists activities will be used for elaboration of better procedure for annual evaluation and dynamic determination of the grazing limits for the different habitats and the different conditions in the different parts of the Park.

5. propose solutions at national level to improve the infrastructure related to mountain pastures, like shelters for animals and shepherds or dairy facilities; improve their visual and ecological impact, as well as their sanitary conditions for dairy production;

The Park Directorate is looking for solutions for the improvement of the conditions in grazing territories – offering legal and at the same time aesthetic variants of shelters for livestock and the herdsmen, creating conditions for primary processing of milk. The status of the park – a protected area of second category according to the Bulgarian legislation and the IUCN, as well as exclusive state property, does not allow the creation of new infrastructure. Variants and funding are sought to give a new look and functions to existing buildings and remains of buildings. During the programming period 2007 – 2013, as part of a project financed by the ERDF through OPE, an activity for the development of a model for 11 pastures from the pasture areas of the park has been carried out. Physical implementation of the model is yet to be funded. The programming period 2014 – 2020 did not provide for such activities to be implemented in protected areas and the OPE is not a financing option. Unfortunately, the only calls from period 2021 – 2027 up to now are related only with actions directly related with the improvement of the condition of species and habitats from Natura 2000 sites, but not for indirect measures like pasture territory organization. We are also looking for opportunities through the status of the Central Balkan Biosphere Reserve (see point 7 below) to offer new possibilities for preserving and marketing these products.

6. explore solutions to increase the role of the national park in the management of tourist infrastructure (chalets) inside the park, including their maintenance, the control of their ecological impact and their use as information points;

The Park Directorate intends to use the mechanisms of the Biosphere Reserve (see point 7 below) in order to implement in partnership with the Bulgarian Tourist Union (the owner of almost all high-mountain accommodation base in Bulgaria), projects for the construction of waste management systems and of waste water management systems in the chalets on the territory of the national park. Frequent changes in the management personnel of the park directorate and the tourism union are one of the obstacles to this happening sooner. Dissatisfaction on the part of the citizens regarding the lagging of the chalets in terms of modernization and greening of their activity is becoming greater. Talks have been held with the participation of the Ministry of Environment and Water, regional governors (those who manage state property by region), BTU and NGOs to overcome the problem of unclear responsibility between owners and operators of the chalets and to find financial instruments for the faster modernization of their infrastructure. In 2024, procedures were launched to establish the real ownership of two chalets and one tourist dormitory, for which there are gaps in the official documents. The position of the Ministry of Environment and Waters is that if the Bulgarian Tourist Union is unable to prove ownership, they should be acquired by the Park Directorate. Development on the issue is pending. In 2025 with agreement between Municipality of Pavel banya and CBNPD the ownership of Sokolna chalet was transferred to the Park Directorate.

7. use the newly established biosphere reserve to reinforce the role of the Public Advisory Council as a link between the national park, the municipalities and civil society organisations around the park; allocate adequate financial and human resources to fulfil the tasks and commitments undertaken at international level with the designation of the park as part of the biosphere reserve and World Heritage property and establish, as soon as possible, corresponding management structures;

In 2025, the Central Balkan National Park Directorate continues to work for the popularization of the BR and its goals through promotional festival events in Central Balkan Biosphere Reserve (third year in row). The first editions of the festivals were held in the autumn of 2023 as a part of the project “Providing support for local entrepreneurs through promotional events in Central Balkan Biosphere Reserve”, funded by the UNESCO Participation Programme. In the autumn of 2024 with own financial resources of the Directorate in 3 of the municipalities from the transition zone of the CBBR the festivals got their second edition. The interest in the events was twice higher than in 2023. In 2025 Park Directorate ask for financial support the Ministry of Environment and Water. Thanks to the provided funding the CBNPD organized the third edition of

the festival in 3 of the municipalities of transition zone. The interest to the events was even higher. Thousands of people learned more about the biosphere reserve as a tool for sustainable development and partnership, about its focus on preserving nature and local cultural identity, about the possibilities for cooperation between people and institutions. Thanks to the success of the initiative, 11 new members joined the CBBR partnership initiative (created in a previous project funded by the Participation Programme). On official ceremony were awarded all partners in the network.

In 2024, the Park Directorate applied with a project proposal "Study on forest ecosystems in mountain water catchments in Central Balkan Biosphere Reserve" within the framework of the 3-year project "Promoting sustainable development through UNESCO's programmes and sites" – a partnership initiative between UNESCO and the abrdn Charitable Foundation. An important condition for the application was the presence of three mandatory elements in the project proposals – research, innovation, education. In response to these requirements, the CBNPD proposed: 1) a study on the impact of forest management on the water regime in a model watershed from the territory of the Central Balkan Biosphere Reserve – that of the Cherni Osam River, 2) development of an interactive module based on the conducted study, which demonstrates/ presents in an accessible way the results of the established dependencies, 3) educational activities with visitors to the Natural History Museum in the village of Cherni Osam and with students from secondary schools from four municipalities in the transition zone of the Central Balkan Biosphere Reserve. After approval, an implementation contract was signed in early October 2024. The contracts with two subcontractors – for scientific and innovative elements, were signed in December 2024. The implementation was conducted in 2025. The final result was several educational events (including art plain air) in the municipalities of transition zone of the BR, developed online e-model for demonstration of the connections between uses in forests, water retention in forests, multifunctional forest management and the conditions of the environment, scientific paper (for recension) and guidance for multifunctional forest management in the mountain watersheds.

8. as soon as possible, prepare and adopt management plans for the Natura 2000 areas adjacent to the park.

The long-awaited legal changes concerning the management of the sites of the NATURA 2000 network were a fact at the end of 2023, when the Central Balkan National Park Directorate was constituted as the governing body of the NATURA 2000 site, completely overlapping the territory of the National Park. Procedures for changes in the structure of the administration of the Ministry of Environment and Water (National Nature Protection Service Directorate) and of the new regional governing bodies was passed in the first quarter of 2024. A new 122 site managers for NATURA 2000 network in Bulgaria started to be hired in the different structures. In the Central Balkan National Park Directorate, two new employees directly involved in the management of the NATURA site Central Balkan were hired in April 2025. The procedure for development of a Management Plan for the site will start in 2026.

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.

No changes in the management approach and structure of the park administration in 2025.

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 the park 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.

In 2025 CBNPD continued to use the EDPA logo for printing materials as follows: calendar for year 2026 (two versions). The logo was used also in all presentations for the CBNP presented by park employees. On the webpage of Central Balkan there is information about the European Diploma of the park and link to the official EDPA webpage.

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