

**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 6.

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:
5

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>

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

1. 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. In 2023 with additional funding provided from the Ministry of Environment and Water continues the work on the project *Detailed outlining of the park boundaries according to data from the AGCC and the enforced cadastral maps, and current MRP of lands of settlements*. The first positive results from the prepared in 2022 projects for actualisations in the official cadastre are already fact. A number of small scale changes for precise reflection of the park boundaries passed the administrative procedures and are introduced into the state cadastral database.

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 – 49 employees and three vacancies (out of 71 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' Department. Through another project funded by the ERDF through OPE (programming period 2014 – 2020) those recommendations from the guidelines, related to the technical provision of the work of the park rangers, have been fulfilled – monitoring and control equipment is provided. Specialized equipment (new GPS devices, drones, transponder readers, new radio, binoculars and night vision devices) and specialized vehicles were delivered.

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. The framework of the administrative procedure for applying, permitting, distributing and controlling the use of the pastures in the park is preserved. For the sixth consecutive year the precision of the processing of the documents has been increased in practice to 100% correct declaration of available livestock (in application forms) and to approx. 75% correct tracking of the grazing process during the pasture season by compiling of the necessary protocols in time. In 2017 had expired the last agri-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. In 2022 new limits for grazing in the park were set through the Annual grazing plan. The amount of this type of usage is already limited to the 15000 ha of available in the Management plan up to 16 720 ha. The decision to do so is guided by the need to leave a buffer for the possibility of a reaction – the destruction of habitats due to overloading, natural phenomena of a destructive nature, such as fires, etc. Due to management changes during the active grazing season the sudden massive inspections for compliance with the regimes and norms were slightly less than in 2022. By decision of the Minister of Environment and Water of the Republic of Bulgaria from September 2018 the Park Directorate is a beneficiary under a project financed by the ERDF under the OPE. Within this project measures to protect and restore habitats throughout the park are implemented in the years up to 2023. In 2023 (for fourth year in row) on some critical border lines between pasture lands and other park areas with no

commercial uses were positioned wooden and electric fences. After the end of pasture season they were dismantled.

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

One of the activities in the above mentioned ERDF-funded project is to establish a methodology for the annual assessment of natural habitats subject to livestock grazing. This methodology will assess the productivity of pastures according to the types of natural habitats in them and the specific conditions of the environment. In addition, the status of natural habitats in pastureland will be monitored in relation to the intensity and duration of their use by livestock. The application of the methodology will allow assessment of the overall condition of habitats used for livestock grazing. It will contribute to the precision in making management decisions on the ways and times of resource use. The technical specification and the tender documentation for the procurement have been prepared in 2019. Selection of contractor was finished in the spring of 2020. The implementation on terrain was held in the period 2020 – 2021. Sample plots are selected; pilot testing of the suggested from the implementer amended methodology was applied in both field seasons. In parallel, training was provided to the employees of the Park Directorate. In early 2022 the final report with the elaborated methodology was submitted in the park administration. In the period June – July 2023 4 employees of the expert department applied the methodology in 7 trial areas. The collection of information into the database to be used for analysis in the near future has begun.

Thanks to targeted funding from the Ministry of Environment and Water, at the beginning of November 2023, a contract was signed with the Institute for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences for external expert assistance in expanding the scope of the monitoring scheme. Thanks to scientists – specialists in the field of natural resource uses and phytocenology, additional new sample plots will be established in pasture areas in the Park, where currently no monitoring has been carried out according to the developed methodology. The wider scope of monitoring activities will give a more complete picture of the state of pasture resources and make management decisions about pasture uses more precise.

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 of the problems of domestication of pastures – offering legal and at the same time aesthetic variants of shelters for livestock and the herdsman, 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 previous 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. This programming period (2014 – 2020) does not provide for such activities to be implemented in protected areas and the OPE is not a financing option at least until new calls from period 2021 – 2027 (none have been announced as of 2023). 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.

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 2023, the Central Balkan National Park Directorate made an extraordinary effort to create a joint body for the management of the Central Balkan Biosphere Reserve. After applying for expert assistance from UNESCO, the Park Directorate received the support of the Earth Network Mission programme. An expert

from the MAB programme visited the Central Balkan region three times in the period March – June 2023 and participated in the meetings organized by the CBNPD with a wide range of stakeholders. As a result, an optimization of the version of the Coordination Council of the CBBR was proposed, which now includes other stakeholders, in addition to the institutions directly involved in the management of the territories – the park directorate, municipal administrations, the Executive Forestry Agency. In the new project of a management body, a management board is foreseen. In the new project of the management body, a management board is envisaged, including 9 to 11 stakeholders representing institutions, business and livelihoods from the BR region. This board will have an annual contribution to the joint structure's overall budget and will take management decisions. An advisory board of other stakeholders – local businesses, representatives of craft and culture chambers, scientists will oversee the work of the board and provide expert opinion. It is envisaged that two employees of the management unit (independent of the stakeholders) will implement the decisions of the management board. Next workshop with the partners is scheduled for late January 2024.

In 2022 CBNPD Directorate as a representative of CBBR apply with a project proposal under the UNESCO Participation Programme. In the fall of 2022, the project "Providing support for local entrepreneurs through promotional events in Central Balkan Biosphere Reserve" was approved. In the fall of 2023 the five biosphere reserve festivals were held in the municipality centres of the five municipalities from the transition zone of the CBBR. The interest in the events was unexpectedly high, both on the part of the exhibitors and the citizens and guests of the respective municipalities. Over 1,300 visitors 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, nearly 20 new members joined the CBBR partnership initiative (created in a previous project funded by the Participation Programme).

In 2023, again through another project funded by the UNESCO Participation Programme, a conference on educational approaches to the presentation of natural and cultural heritage in biosphere parks and reserves was held in Troyan municipality (part of the CBBR transition zone). The conference was organized by the Natural History Museum in the village of Cherni Osam (a partner of the CBBR) and brought together experts on educational programmes in UNESCO designations from 7 countries in Europe. Its results will be applied in the construction of the future "Biosphere" centre at the natural history museum.

In 2023 CBBR accepted sixth and seventh pair volunteers for six month period (starting from March) as part of the initiative of German National Commission for UNESCO – kulturweit.

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 are already a fact. As of 20th of October 2023 the Central Balkan National Park Directorate is constituted as the governing body of the NATURA 2000 site, completely overlapping the territory of the National Park.

Procedures are underway to change the structure of the administration of the Ministry of Environment and Water (National Nature Protection Service Directorate) and of the new regional governing bodies. A new 122 site managers for NATURA 2000 network in Bulgaria will be appointed in early 2024 once the structural changes are finalized. In the Central Balkan National Park Directorate, two new employees directly involved in the management of the NATURA site Central Balkan are expected. The first task of the new team will be the creation of terms of reference for commissioning the development of a Management Plan for the area.

2. 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 Director of Central Balkan National Park Directorate was changed once in 2023. No changes in the management approach and structure of the park administration.

3. 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.

4. 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 2023 CBNPD continued to use the EDPA logo for printing materials as follows: calendar for year 2024, leaflet for the beech forests in the national park as a part of serial world heritage property. The logo is used also in the renewed information boards and signpost in the park. The logo was used also in all presentations for the CBNPD 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

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