

**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 2022

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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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. After the evaluation the implementation of the management plan continues without significant course change. More efforts were put into control of compliance with the regimes and norms outlined in the plan, especially regarding the use of natural resources in the park (see below). Of the implementation of programs and projects indicated in the plan's Part 4 *Operational tasks and prescriptions for conservation and use*, the start of 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* should be noted - one of the very few that had not yet been worked on. With the financial and expert support of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, a process of specifying the borders of the protected territory within the framework of the modern cadastre was launched on the basis of the declaration orders and the relevant maps from the declaration period. This project will enhance the GIS-based information and create prerequisites for outlining the precise boundaries of the park.

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 main part of the work of the Park Directorate is focused on the observance of the regimes and norms of the protected territory. 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. Prevention of poaching (in all its forms) has always been and is one of the main priorities in the daily job of park employees. 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. These ones, related to the technical provision of the work of the park rangers, have been partially fulfilled – monitoring and control equipment (still insufficient quantity) is provided. MOEW regularly provide terrain clothing and shoes for the rangers. Under a new project financed by the ERDF through OPE (programming period 2014 – 2020) specialized equipment (new GPS devices, drones, transponder readers, new radio, binoculars and night vision devices) were delivered. Tendering process for delivery of specialized vehicles with increased patency and fire suppression system is at final stage – a contractor has been selected and the deadline for the delivery of the equipment is running. Deliveries are expected in early 2023.

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 seven 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 fifth 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. Several surprise massive inspections by mixed teams from various park departments and experts from the park directorate were conducted during the active grazing season of 2022. In this way, the park directorate aims to increase the level of compliance with the regimes and norms regarding the use of pasture resources.

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 and will be implemented in the years up to 2023. In 2022 (for third 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. In 2022 was finished started in 2021 restoration of the some of the old watering facilities in the pasture areas of the park. This will reduce the negative pressure on streams and downstream habitats in pasture areas.

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. The first independently implementation of the methodology started in July when 4 employees of the expert department applied it in 7 trial areas. The collection of information into the database to be used for analysis in the near future has begun.

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 to 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 2020. We are also looking for opportunities through the status of the Central Balkan Biosphere Reserve (see point 7 below) to offer new opportunities 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.

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 organizations 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;

With decision of 29th session of the International Coordinating Council of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme (June 2017) CBNP became part of Central Balkan Biosphere Reserve (CBBR). The nine

reserves into the park are the core zone of the BR. The remain part of the park is the buffer zone of the BR. Five of the municipalities around the national park are forming the transition area of the new BR. Central Balkan BR became one of the first four Bulgarian post-Seville type biosphere reserves. Biosphere Reserve is not a category of protected area under Bulgarian law, and so far it has not been difficult to manage the areas with such designation because they had fallen entirely within the scope of strict nature reserves. With the announcement of the first 4 post-Seville biosphere reserves in front the administrations responsible for the respective territories and the other stakeholders raised a new challenge. This is the organization of a common management body to function at the level of partner relations between the cooperating parties in the framework of the MAB designation. At the end of 2017, the Park Directorate initiated the first meeting of the partner administrations within the largest and most complexly organized biosphere reserve in Bulgaria – the CBBR. The partner administrations are the Park Directorate, five municipal administrations and the Executive Forest Agency. After a series of meetings between partners and consultations with lawyers, a model for formalizing cooperation has been developed. It is the Coordination Council of the Biosphere Reserve, which will represent each of the seven administrations, including through a civilian quota. The Coordinating Council's draft statutes have already been developed, working groups on the issues of the biosphere reserve have been established (in which the partners' expertise is currently attracted), and registration of the organization under Bulgarian law is ongoing. The local elections in 2019 and Covid-19 crisis in 2020 and 2021 and frequent changes in the management personnel of the park directorate delayed the process of formalizing the partnership, but the informal partnership continued, mainly focusing on the development of information materials, presentation of the biosphere reserve in the media space, festivals in the municipalities from the transition zone (not in 2020), etc. In 2022 CBBR was approved for participation in Earth Network mission that will provide mediation and expert help enhancing the process of Coordination Council formalization.

In 2022 CBNP 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. Its implementation is expected in 2023. The aim of the project idea is to support the partners' network of the Central Balkan Biosphere Reserve that was developed through previous project funded through UNESCO Participation Programme in the previous programme period.

In 2022 CBBR accepted fourth and fifth pair volunteers for six/twelve 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.

In 2018, a new concept was developed at the national level for the management of Natura 2000 sites in Bulgaria. According to the concept the management of the sites is assumed by the regional inspectorates for environment and water – the regional bodies (subdivisions) of the Ministry of Environment and Water. In 2019 the decision for inclusion of the national park directorates in this process was taken. This applies to the sites that have a territorial overlap with the parks. The legal changes are still under preparation. Funding from the ERDF through OPE is provided to develop management plans for all Natura 2000 sites over the next 5 years. The process is expected to begin immediately after the legal changes that will allow this to happen. In 2020 and 2021 the initiative in this field was seriously delayed due to Covid-19 crisis and internal political crisis. In 2022 the political instability also delayed the process. The issue has already been considered by a parliamentary committee. The Ministry of Environment and Water has assigned an additional two employees to the Parks Directorate to be responsible for the NATURA sites, in case the planned changes in the legislation take place.

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 three times in 2022.

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 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 2022 CBNPD continued to use the EDPA logo for printing materials as follows: calendar for year 2023. 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