

Criteria for the award of the European Diploma for Protected Areas

The criteria are in keeping with the various conservation objectives to be met by any protected area eligible for the European Diploma for Protected Areas, together with the protective measures needed for their achievement.

Having regard to the differing protection status of protected areas in Europe, it is necessary to refer to general criteria and specific criteria.

General criteria

The following general criteria should be taken into consideration for every area for which an application is submitted.

A. European interest

The applicant area must comprise representative elements of the biological, geological and/or landscape heritage which are of exceptional European importance (protection of the biological and/or landscape heritage – scientific, cultural, aesthetic and/or recreational qualities).

These should be, according to the area:

1. areas of particular importance for the conservation of biological diversity in Europe. They may comprise:
 - remarkable or threatened examples of plant or animal communities, as well as areas inhabited by a large number of species;
 - highly representative samples of types of habitats and plant or animal communities constituting typical examples of the various kinds of ecosystem in Europe;
 - habitats in an unfavourable state of conservation;
 - habitats of endemic species or species in an unfavourable state of conservation, particularly endangered species;
 - breeding grounds of animals protected under the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (ETS No. 104) and resting and feeding areas for migratory species.
2. areas aimed at conserving remarkable natural phenomena or geological or physiographic formations characteristic of the Earth's history. These may include:
 - sites or complexes of major importance for the conservation of significant evidence of the Earth's history;
 - noteworthy palaeontological sites;
 - outstanding examples of geological, geomorphological, volcanic, hydrographic, physiographic or biogeographical phenomena;
 - particularly grandiose or spectacular examples of protected natural features such as waterfalls, caves, rock formations, glacial cirques, glaciers.
3. areas of particular importance for the conservation of landscape diversity in Europe. These may comprise:
 - sites or landscapes of outstanding aesthetic or cultural value or of a spectacular nature;
 - complexes conserved as evidence of the history of the countryside or woodlands in Europe;
 - country or wooded areas which are cultivated using extensive methods and constitute typical examples of European landscapes.

B. Protection measures

The area for which an application is submitted must:

1. have a legal protection status, by means of an act or decree of the competent authorities certifying that the area is adequately protected;

2. be taken into account in regional planning in order to prevent the approval of projects which run counter to the objectives of the area;
3. be the subject, if possible, of a zoning, which must indicate the objectives of each subdivision described; the boundaries between the area for which an application is submitted and the surrounding area must be clearly marked on a plan or a geographical map, particularly where there are nearby protected areas with different objectives (as is often the case in a biosphere reserve); failing that, the uses of the land which are authorised should be clearly indicated;
4. be the subject of a development and management plan (finalised or in preparation). As management constitutes an important point in judging the application, the various aspects of management will need to be presented in detail and objectively assessed, principally with regard to those entailing more extensive subsequent development;
5. be assessed taking into account the impact that the surrounding area has or is likely to have on it;
6. have an organisation which provides guarantees concerning staff and financial resources. The latter must be sufficient to ensure management that meets the objectives of the protection area. A staff organisation chart applicable at the time of lodging the application, and a presentation of the budget for the two previous years, will constitute useful information for evaluating the form of management of the applicant area.

Specific criteria

The specific criteria serve to explain why the area concerned has been given protected status.

One of the two groups of specific criteria should be taken into consideration, as the case may be.

A. The essential goal of the protected area is to preserve biological and landscape diversity and ecosystems.

The applicant area which meets this goal must also meet the following specific criteria:

1. existence of strict regulations on any artificial change in the environment or any biological and geological depredation (no hunting, fishing, picking, cutting or uprooting), with certain possible exceptions for justifiable scientific purposes aimed at controlling or maintaining certain species and/or environments;
2. absence of permanent human occupation and of economic activities such as agriculture, forestry, mining, industry and tourism (no development). Certain traditional activities may be authorised for the sole purpose of maintaining the environment. Certain obligations, previous to the award of the Diploma, can be allowed to continue, provided they are localised and controlled and do not interfere with maintaining the biological and landscape diversity of the area. An attempt should be made to minimise or even eliminate them;
3. guarantees that the existing human activities and installations in the surrounding area cannot damage the physical and biological integrity of the protected area;
4. supervision, arrangements for patrolling by wardens or any other means with the possibility of enforcement, such as the power to report offenders;
5. no access for the public unless specially authorised and in any case regulated and/or channelled in a manner appropriate to the habitats;
6. presentation, in keeping with the ecological interest of the area, of research and monitoring programmes.

B. The objective of the protected area is to preserve biological and landscape diversity, together with harmonious and sustainable development of socio-economic and educational functions.

The applicant area which meets this objective must also meet the following specific criteria:

1. the type of use of the land must be clearly indicated, especially where agriculture, forestry, tourism, leisure activities, buildings and infrastructures are concerned, as well as the respective owners;
2. permanent human occupation and socio-economic activities must be conceived in such a way as to uphold the principles of sustainable development; they must not damage the integrity of the natural and cultural values of the protected area;
3. hunting and fishing may be tolerated providing that it is subject to a strict regulation to avoid weakening the animal population;
4. there must be adequate supervision, including the possibility of enforcement, in order to prevent damage those aspects specifically protected;
5. public access must be authorised and regulated; in certain cases it may be unrestricted. Provision must always be made for reception centres and educational facilities in order to channel the public and thereby avoid damage.