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EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FOR THE CONSERVATION OF
NATURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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Committee of Experts - Protected Areas

ABRUZZI NATIONAL PARK
(Italy)

Category B

On-the-spot appraisal

by

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1. INTRODUCTION

The period of validity of the European Diploma awarded to the Abruzzi National Park expires in 1987. In order to assess whether it should be extended, the Secretariat instructed me to carry out an on-the-spot appraisal in accordance with the regulations in force (see Appendix I), together with its representative, Mr P Baum.

We visited the park on 17 and 18 September 1985.

Since the Diploma was last renewed - with some hesitation (see Appendix I, 3-5) - several facts have alarmed the Committee of Experts - Protected Areas:

- the absence of annual reports,
- disturbing news of the drop in the Abruzzi bear population,
- a call for the Secretariat to withdraw the Diploma.

These developments obviously demanded special vigilance on my part and prompted me to check the current state of the park as closely and effectively as possible, in the company of Mr Baum, bearing in mind the requirements of the regulations on the award of the Diploma (see Appendix I).

At the outset some discouraging signs confirmed the regrettable facts noted above:

- the Director, Mr F Tassi, was away for the duration of our visit, touring national parks in Canada and the United States;
- the Chairman of the park's Board of Management and the members living in Pescasseroli had not been informed of our visit.

Yet it had been officially announced in July that Council of Europe experts would visit the park.

In addition, despite my prior knowledge of the park, I find it difficult to base my observations on insufficient material (in the absence of annual reports) or inadequate information from the park authorities.

In future this will not do!

I accordingly propose that the following principles be adopted:

- 1.1 An annual report providing a detailed description of the current state of the park (see Appendix I to the regulations on the award of the Diploma) will have to be submitted to the Council of Europe. If the report is not sent in, is incomplete or proves inaccurate on essential points during the on-the-spot appraisal, the award of the Diploma will automatically lapse.
- 1.2 It is essential that the Director of the protected area and the Chairman of the Board of Management be present during the appraisal.

In view of the critical situation prevailing in the park, as indicated above, the Committee of Experts - Protected Areas, at its meeting on 13 and 14 May 1985, instructed the experts detailed to carry out the on-the-spot appraisal with a view to the renewal of the European Diploma to study ways and means of helping the national authorities to save the park. The committee also expressed the wish that Professor Pavan and a representative of the Ministry of Agriculture should take part in the inspection (see Appendix I, 8b).

These requests were complied with. The presence of Professor Pavan proved particularly helpful and I take the opportunity of offering him my sincere thanks. Many years ago his strenuous and praiseworthy efforts were decisive in securing the award of the Diploma to the Abruzzi National Park in order to save the bear population; he can therefore be regarded as the person best acquainted with the state of the park at the time.

In addition to the representatives of the park administration who nevertheless introduced themselves and expressed willingness to help during our visit (Mr G Rossi, Dr. Cimini, Dressa. L Naviglio), the representatives of the forestry service (Dr. C Ferri, Dr. G Potena and Dr. E Talieri) took part in the inspection. Lastly, our discussions with the mayors or deputy mayors of the park municipalities (Dr. M Neri, Pescasseroli; Dr. G Cimini, Opi; Mr Alfredo, Civitella Alfedena and Mr R di Cola, Barrea) proved fruitful and augured well for the protection of the park.

2. RESULTS OF THE APPRAISAL

2.1 General remarks

Enough has already been said of the importance of the Abruzzi National Park for nature and landscape conservation (see Appendix I, 8).

By way of introduction a few reminders may be useful (see Appendix I, 3 and 4):

- National park established in 1922
- Abolition of the Ente Autonomo Parco Nazionale d'Abruzzo in 1950
- National park re-established in 1950
- Serious repercussions of tourist development on the park in the 1960s
- 1962-69: park management without a Director
- 1967: application for the European Diploma
- 1972: award of category B Diploma after the Italian Government gave assurances that it would curb tendencies towards neglect and dereliction of the park.

As far as I know, there has been no substantial change in the situation over the past five years. A brief outline of the 1980 Secretariat report (see Appendix I, 4) is therefore given below:

- central (diploma-holding) area of 40,000 ha, 61.5% (24,000 ha) of which consists of forests, 31% of pastures and 7.5% of cultivated fields. Most of the forests are beech, though *Quercus cerris* and *Ostrya carpinifolia* prevail on the warmer slopes and at lower altitudes;
- 96% of woodlands are owned by the municipalities and only 0.25% by the park. The rest is private property. About 2% of the park's forests are under long-term lease;
- about 70% of woodlands are high forest and 30% coppice forest;
- five municipalities are located inside the central area and 18 own land in the central and peripheral areas;
- peripheral area of 60,000 ha.

2.2 Protection of flora, vegetation and fauna

The observations we made during the inspection and the information we obtained in the course of our investigations show that no major changes have occurred since the previous appraisal five years ago. The only exception is the alarming drop in the Abruzzi brown bear population (see Appendix II).

The data published by Mr F Zunino, an expert on the subject, are so disturbing that the park management, with the assistance of the authorities, must be compelled to make every effort to do away with the causes of damage - primarily human behaviour - and secure the survival of the species in the region.

According to the park authorities, about 80 bears live in and around the park. Other sources put the figure at 40. What is the exact number? : As the bear has approximately the same food requirements as the boar, closer attention will have to be paid in future to the latter's behaviour. As in the past, the park administration awards grants to encourage farmers to plant maize or fruit trees as a means of increasing the bears' food resources. The stag population stands at about 350; there is no mention of damage. The stray dog problem has still not been settled.

2.3 Legal status

During our visit reference was made to two decrees which might have important consequences:

- the decree known as Lex Galasso - still disputed - which prohibits further building along all coastlines and river banks and on heights more than 1,600m above sea level throughout Italy;
- the Court of Cassation's ruling on powers with regard to spatial planning in the national park.

The exact legal situation and its repercussions on the park will have to be explained to the Secretariat before renewal of the Diploma.

2.4 Financial resources and legal status of the park

2.4.1 Financial resources

The Council of Europe's Resolution (82) 2 of 3 June 1982 on the last renewal of the Diploma (Appendix I, 5) stipulates that the park administration must regularly receive the necessary financial resources to enable it to manage the area properly and give effective protection to wildlife and landscapes.

What is the current state of affairs?

Financing appears to have taken a turn for the better, according to the information supplied by the Deputy Director, Mr Rossi:

The park administration receives the following amounts:

1981: 1.1 thousand million Lire

1982: 2 thousand million Lire

1983: 2.6 thousand million Lire

1984: 4.3 thousand million Lire

1985: 3.8 thousand million Lire from the state

(budget: 4.3 thousand million Lire) and 5 thousand million Lire from the regional authorities.

Strangely enough, the upshot is that the administration - for reasons mentioned under 2.5 - is for the moment unable to use the resources at its disposal to fulfil the aims of the park satisfactorily.

However, this difficulty - which must be solved as soon as possible - must not lead to a cut in financial aid to the park or even to delay in payments. A misguided policy of the kind might well jeopardise the park's future. On the contrary, radical administrative improvements must be made, as indicated below.

Meanwhile, the park administration might do well to consider whether it would be in the general interest to increase the financial resources available to the park municipalities as suggested by the young mayor of Civitella Alfedena, who illustrated the idea with several examples.

2.4.2 Administrative situation

See Appendix I, 3, 4 and 5 for introductory information. How do things stand at present?

The Administrative Council responsible for park policy (hereafter the "Council") has been regularly enlarged over the past five years. Full attendance was recorded only in 1983, which obviously paralyses administrative work. The Council now consists of a Chairman and 21 members (four scientists and representatives of industry, tourism, agriculture and forestry, cultural circles, nature conservation and provincial and local authorities).

The park administration considers that sub-committees with decision-making powers must be set up if a Council with such a large, heterogeneous membership is to be truly effective. They should be responsible for such matters as scientific research, environmental protection, planning, agriculture and forestry, tourism and administration (staff, information, maintenance etc). I share this view and recommend implementing the proposal.

According to my information, the present administrative structure of the national park is as follows:

Management: Director - Mr Tassi, with headquarters in Rome

Deputy Director - Mr Rossi (Administration)

Mr Cimini (Planning)

Mrs Naviglio (Science and information)

(These last two officials are not currently employed on a full-time basis)

- four information centres with 50 part-time employees
- 37 wardens (21 full-time and 16 part-time, the latter mainly in summer).

According to the administration (Mr Rossi), 70 to 80 wardens are needed to meet all the park's needs in full.

This raises the question of whether it would be advisable to train and employ more staff for the forestry service covering the park. The forestry service officials seemed quite willing to do this when we met them, though our interview was necessarily very brief. This appears to be an eminently desirable solution, but as the time allotted for the appraisal was so short, we were unable to assess whether it would encounter obstacles such as a clash of fully justified major interests within the park itself.

We concluded that:

- the second condition attached by the Council of Europe to the last renewal of the Diploma (Resolution (82) 2) had not been fulfilled;
- the renewal of the Diploma must be conditional on a formal declaration by the Italian Government that it is prepared to make radical, lasting improvements in the park's administrative structure and the number and quality of maintenance staff in order to ensure the park's survival.

2.5 Management plan for the whole park (central and peripheral areas)

The Council of Europe rightly emphasised the importance of this point when the Diploma was last renewed (Resolution (82) 2), because it ultimately conditions the authorities' willingness to allow the park to continue in existence with its present aims.

As far as we were able to ascertain during our visit, there appear to be two management plans differing in their objectives and legal scope:

- the plan for the municipalities, which falls under their authority and is subject to regional supervision, while allowing the park administration to express its views;
- the plan for the park itself with its four zones A-D (see Appendix I, 3 and Appendix II), which concentrates on nature and landscape conservation.

Undoubtedly, many problems still stand in the way of a solution on these two points, which are of paramount importance for the future of the park. However, as we saw for ourselves on our visit, especially during discussions with the mayors or deputy mayors of the municipalities, relations between the latter and the park administration have substantially improved. Mutual understanding of the other partner's specific goals and, above all, awareness of the park's importance have clearly increased. Even in the municipality of Opi changes for the better now look possible.

It remains for the Council of Europe to express the hope, or indeed to demand, that this improvement in relations associated with spatial planning should continue in the best interests of the national park.

2.6 Grazing and forestry

The park administration has carried out two studies of the pastures' grazing capacity, based on different methods. They demonstrated that grazing is currently well in excess of accepted standards, causing damage to fauna. It is absolutely essential to find a satisfactory solution to this state of affairs.

The forests consist primarily of beech, with maple, oak, ash and *Pinus nigra* in places. Nowadays (ie since 1970), forestry experts set great store by an almost natural combination of species and a corresponding regeneration of woodlands. The forestry service has 50 wardens who could, in its view, help with supervising the park. Generally speaking, the current treatment of the park forests does not appear to pose major problems. To clarify the situation once and for all, however, it is imperative to draw up the following plans of the park and its peripheral area;

- overall plan of natural potential species associations;
- overall plan of current stands (remains of "virgin forest", species combination, age structure);
- overall plan of the forestry goals to be achieved (conservation of remains of "virgin forest" by dropping all forestry activities, restoration of almost natural stands to "virgin forest" state, conversion of non-native stands to almost natural stands, etc).

2.7 Tourism

Here too attitudes have changed.

The municipalities, for instance, are no longer talking of development in terms of intensive tourism (cable cars, ski-lifts, large-scale tourist accommodation or holiday homes). There is even a distinct tendency to keep

tourist facilities (such as camping sites) close to the villages and subject them to time-limits. The municipality of Opi is now aware that the unauthorised camping site set up by the so-called "American" on its territory must find a way of blending more closely with the landscape.

All signs point to the emergence of an environment-friendly form of tourism, with far-reaching implications.

In my view, the Abruzzi National Park is on the right track as far as tourism is concerned.

2.8 Reception and information. Scientific research

- The number of visitors, which stands at about 1 million a year, does not appear to have increased substantially.
- Information policy does not call for special comment; on the contrary, praiseworthy efforts have been made in this area (see Appendix I,3).
- Scientific research: research projects, which Professor Noirfalise mentioned in his 1976 appraisal (Appendix I,2), still deserve sustained attention and support. The need for them is as great as ever. Applied research, which is essential for the maintenance of the park, must take pride of place in all fields.

2.9 Waste and sewage disposal

The rubbish tip outside the park called for at the time of the last renewal (Appendix I,5) has not yet been introduced. It is proposed, however, to install a tip for the park and surrounding area which would become operational in about a year and be run by the mountain region (Comunità montana). It will be located on the territory of Castel di Sangro, outside the peripheral area of the park, about 40 km east of Pescasseroli. In addition to the rubbish tips inside the park, there are still dumps of rubble from houses demolished after the earthquake which mainly hit the municipalities of Barrea and Civitella Alfedena.

The disaster incidentally prompted a solidarity drive between the municipalities and the park administration, which have joined forces for rebuilding and other schemes in the future. It is absolutely essential to devise a way of making the dumps compatible with the environment.

The problem of sewage disposal remains in abeyance. However, a speedy solution is expected in the Pescasseroli area.

3. CONCLUSION

On the basis of our observations on the spot, the discussions held during our visit and the appraisal itself, we propose renewal of the category B Diploma.

This conclusion was reached with some hesitation, however, and is subject to strict observance of the conditions listed under 4.

4. CONDITIONS

4.1 Where the conditions laid down by the Council of Europe at the time of the previous renewal (see Appendix I,5) have not been fulfilled, this will have to be done before the next appraisal.

4.2 In addition, the following conditions must be satisfied without fail:

4.2.1 Top priority must be given in practice and research alike to the protection of vegetation and of the bear, the wolf and other wild animals. The Council of Europe can no longer tolerate the decline in the bear population recorded over the past five years and should withdraw the Diploma in the event of failure to observe the regulations governing protection.

4.2.2 The Administrative Council will have to explain the exact legal position and its repercussions on the park to the Secretariat before renewal of the Diploma (see 2.3).

4.2.3 All spatial planning decisions affecting the park and its peripheral area must give priority to fulfilment of the park's aims.

4.2.4 In future, provision of the funds required to pursue these policies must be guaranteed.

The administrative situation must be improved to enable the authorities involved in management of the park to overcome any obstacles to the survival of the park and the achievement of its goals, bearing in mind the possibility of co-operation with other services involved.

Above all, account will have to be taken of the proposals mentioned under 2.4.2.

4.2.5 Forestry and agricultural activities will have to comply with the park's aims. Forestry maps (see 2.6) must be drawn up and solutions devised to safeguard the fauna or pursue measures already taken for the purpose.

4.2.6 It is absolutely essential to prevent the excesses arising from intensive tourism. The only acceptable solution for the park is environment-friendly tourism.

4.2.7 The CDSN must be informed of the steps taken to satisfy these conditions, primarily by means of the annual reports to be submitted to the Council of Europe in compliance with the regulations (I received assurances on the subject in Rome).

The Council of Europe Secretariat will have to be informed sufficiently in advance of the next on-the-spot appraisal whether the above conditions have been fulfilled. It will also be essential to guarantee the presence of the park authorities throughout the appraisal.