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Group of specialists – European Diploma for Protected Areas

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Abruzzi National Park
(Italy)

RENEWAL

Expert report
by Mr. Jean Renault (Belgium)

The European Diploma for Protected Areas was awarded to the Abruzzi National Park in 1967, in category B, and has been renewed since then.

The Secretariat did not accompany the expert on his visit to the site.

Appendix I describes the Abruzzi, Latium and Molise National Park. Appendix II reproduces Resolution (97) 17 adopted at the last renewal of the Diploma. Appendix III presents a draft resolution drawn up by the Secretariat with a view to a new extension of its period of validity.

I. INTRODUCTION

The European Diploma was granted to the Abruzzi National Park in 1967, since when it has been regularly renewed.

This on-site appraisal--officially scheduled for 5-6 July 2001--was actually carried out from 4 to 9 July 2001, with a view to the deciding whether to renew the diploma in 2002.

The expert was not accompanied by a member of the Council of Europe Secretariat.

I should like to express my sincere gratitude to all those persons who guided, informed and accompanied me during my visit, in particular Mr. Franco Tassi, Director-Superintendent, and Mrs. Fulvia Bacigalupo, in charge of the International Sector, for their help and hospitality. Special thanks must go to Mr. Pasqualino Leone, Chief Warden, who accompanied and drove me about throughout my visit.

In addition to the conversations I had with the Park Director, this visit gave me a chance to meet the people running the main Park departments, namely Mr. Renato Di Cola, senior official in charge of the Surveillance, Administration and Personnel Department, and the Legal Department, Mr. Daniele Fazi, in charge of the Accounts Department, Mr. Stefano Maugeri, head of the Graphic and Art Department, Mrs. Cinzia Sulli, head of the Scientific and Environmental Department, and Mr. Sergio Rozzi, in charge of the Technical and City-planning Department. On my visit I was also able to meet local representatives, in particular Mr. Giancarlo Massimi, Chairman of the Park Community and Mayor of Civitella Alfedena, and Mr. Francesco Gizzi, Mayor of Opi.

On my field visits I was able to get an overview of most of the Park zones in all three regions (Abruzzi, Latium, and Molise), from valleys to heights, home to chamois. I also had a chance to visit several visitor reception centres (including those currently being set up) and attend the "Parco in fiore/Park in Flower" event, which would seem to be one of the Park's especially successful and memorable programmes.

Excellent reports have been written up by Mr. Pierre Hunkeler during previous on-site appraisals undertaken in July 1991 and October 1996. The gist of these reports is still altogether pertinent to the present situation. Instead of preparing a completely new report, which would merely use different words to express the same realities, I feel it is more constructive to present this report on the basis of previous ones, sticking with their structure and pointing out any developments observed. Substantial borrowings (text in *italics*) have thus been made from earlier reports to remind us of the most important factors in the description of the Park. It should also be noted that a very comprehensive website (www.pna.it) now contains a great deal of information to which readers may refer.

II. LOCATION AND IMPORTANCE OF THE PARK

Located in the heart of the Apennines, the Abruzzi National Park currently covers 50,228 ha in the central area and 76,029 ha in the peripheral area. These figures include the significant addition occurring in 2000 with the inclusion within the Park of part of the Giovenco valley (6,196 ha), at the request of the local villages concerned. The park encompasses several valleys separated by mainly limestone mountainous regions, whose highest point is Monte Greco (2,285 metres). The Park's identity card, giving all principal data, features in Appendix 1.

The location, altitude range and varied exposures of the Park account for the great wealth of its fauna and flora.

The "Biodiversity" project, which is currently nearing completion, has recorded a far higher number of species than hitherto estimated. There are more than 2,000 species of flowering plants, 66 species of mammals--including the wolf, bear, lynx and Abruzzi chamois--, 230 species of birds, 16 reptiles, 12 amphibians and 24 fish. More than 4,700 species of insects have been listed.

The special success of the Park stems in particular from the balance struck between the overriding need to protect wild- and plant-life, on the one hand, and the presence of a local community and some 2 million visitors per annum, on the other.

To borrow the words of Mr. Franco Tassi himself, the Park's success is founded on the conservation strategy being applied, based on innovative and unconventional criteria. *"The essential feature of this strategy resides in its inter-disciplinary and inter-sectorial approach which, though founded on a sound knowledge of environmental, ecological and biological realities, is in no way limited to this knowledge but, rather, goes well beyond it, encompassing every aspect of the spiritual, cultural and social reality associated therewith. Otherwise put, it takes into account the basic eco-sociological outlook, whose aim is to uncover the deepest roots of social behaviour (positive, indifferent and negative attitudes) with regard to modern environmental issues, and thus underpins the conservation programme on the basis of a principle which is not merely right and proper, but also suitable for achieving the targets set in a concrete sense"*. [Tassi, F., 1996, *National Parks and other protected areas: conservation and development in balance*--Council of Europe International Conference--Maribor (Slovenia) 12-14 September 1996].

It is worth emphasizing the fact that the present-day balance is still an eminently dynamic one, which is extremely reliant on the activities undertaken by those in charge of the Park. It is as a result of these busy activities and the on-going involvement of those in charge of the Park, all answerable to its director, Mr. Franco Tassi, that it is possible to develop and channel a form of ecotourism capable of guaranteeing the villages in the Park a future, without having to have recourse to development projects which might have adverse effects on the conservation of the natural heritage. It is also worth noting that this situation of dynamic balance gives rise to a certain element of tension, not to say conflict, between the Park, on the one hand, and certain local, regional and national officials, on the other.

The existing organization and management methods applied in the Park enable a viable population of large carnivores, such as wolves and bears, to live alongside the large number of inhabitants and tourists, without harming animal husbandry.

This animal husbandry may well seem to be an increasingly marginal activity, but, conversely, the development of tourism is particularly striking. Given the number of visitors, on the one hand and, on the other, the ever more necessary channelling of this throng of visitors towards activities compatible with nature conservation--that is, usually outside areas of major biological importance--, it is really possible to talk in terms of mass ecotourism which, admittedly, guarantees the economic development of the Park, but raises the question as to whether it can really offer visitors in search of an authentic "nature experience" the sort of high quality tourism which has hitherto been synonymous with ecotourism. It must nevertheless be admitted that the potential number of visitors within a restricted radius is still quite enough to ensure the long-term success of this type of mass ecotourism.

III. ADMINISTRATION

The Abruzzi National Park is a self-governing body ("Ente"). The Chairman heads the Administrative Board, the Park's highest authority, and liaises with the "Park Community", where local interests are represented (25 municipal authorities, 3 regions, 3 provinces, 6 mountain communities). The scientific committee delivers opinions to the Administrative Board on issues within its field of responsibility. Management is carried out by the Park Directorate.

The Park headquarters are located in the middle of the Park, at Pescasseroli, while the actual head office is in Rome, which facilitates both contacts with central government and promotional activities. The Rome head office is expressly provided for in the framework legislation on protected areas, but is contested by the Abruzzi region.

Most of the funding is met by central government. The State's financial contribution was 9.3 billion lire (4.8 million) in 2000 and, pending final approval, should rise to 12.5 billion lire (6.46 million) in 2001. Added to this sum is the Park's self-financing system, which totalled 1.27 billion lire (0.66 million) in 2000.

Among expenditure items, the personnel payroll accounts for by far the largest sum: 5.7 billion lire (2.94 million) in 2000. Operating costs total 2.4 billion lire (1.24 million) and payments to institutions (compensation, rentals) account for 1.66 billion lire (0.86 million).

Alongside this budget, the Park has managed to draw on major resources hailing from European Funds. Between 1997 and 2000, a sum of about 30 billion lire (15.5 million) was thus raised and effectively spent (98%), mainly for communication activities. For the future, likewise, the Park will play an important part in raising these European Funds (Life, Structural Funds) for the villages and regions where it is situated. For the next few years, as part of the management plan, it has formulated a series of special projects in 20 strategic areas of the Park. If these projects are approved by the Committee, they will represent a total investment of 1000 billion lire (51.65 million), to be paid by European funds. These projects are based essentially on the natural interest of the Park.

So the Park can be said to benefit from considerable financing. Bearing in mind the requirements associated with the many projects under way (information centre operation, Park enlargement, increase of compensation to municipal authorities), might this financing ever be regarded as adequate? For those running the Park, the answer is obviously no. Over and above the degree of financial aid, there is still the recurrent problem of making the funding allocated to the Park available far too late in the day. These delays give rise to major management problems, for the Park is forced to borrow money in order to be able to honour its payments, and in particular the payment of salaries and the settlement of compensation due to the villages concerned. It is not easy to make forecasts in so far as the budget itself usually takes a long time to be approved.

The problem has recently become even more complicated. While previously, an individual budget was earmarked for each park, at the present time an overall credit is voted for all the parks; this credit must then be divided up among the different parks, which merely prolongs the whole procedure. When I made my visit (7 July 2001), the Park was still operating on the basis of quarterly advances, because the promised budget had not been finally decided upon. It is understandable that those in charge of the Park have the feeling that these delays work against efficiency, by putting a brake on activities.

IV. MANAGEMENT

1. Zoning

The zoning carried out in 1984 is proving quite satisfactory and its implementation has now met with full acceptance by all partners. The Park is divided into the following zones:

zone A, full reserve
zone B, general reserve
zone C, protection area
zone D, development area
peripheral area (outer park).

The Park is in very satisfactory control of the situation in zones A and B. The only problem still to be remedied is the transfer of forest reserves to the Park, provided for in the framework legislation but yet to be carried out. This is not posing any real management problems, rather a problem of coherence in the measures applied (wildlife monitoring, extra food for the bears) and, probably even more so, a problem of prestige to do with the rivalry existing between the National Park and the Forestry Corps. This anomaly should be sorted out once and for all.

In Zone C wildlife protection is properly taken into account, but the abandonment of traditional farming activities is continuing.

In zone D the Park's decisions are being complied with; all applications for building permits must be made to the Park authorities. Large-scale projects, especially tourism-related ones, are virtually ruled out.

The problem of solid waste has now been almost solved and only one or two dumps remain to be dealt with. The treatment of waste water, however, still leaves a lot to be desired. This problem of waste water treatment is purely seasonal, because the existing stations are not designed to treat the quantities generated by the large number of visitors present in the summer months.

In the peripheral zone, the Park's opinions are as a rule properly complied with. At the present time, there are no development projects of an excessive nature, or likely to harm the Park. Nevertheless, several projects should be kept a close eye on by the Park authorities:

Establishment of ski lifts: the "Snow Plan" formulated by the Abruzzi region seems to have completely overlooked the existence of the National Parks.

A water basin project.

Houses built without permits.

Banned campsites, especially in flood-prone zones.

It is actually quite difficult to control and monitor rough camping, be it in unauthorized sites or outside every kind of site (the main culprit being the camping car). Although the impact on nature and wildlife is relatively limited, this sort of camping nevertheless gives rise to rubbish problems and an excessive concentration of tourists in and around certain villages.

Without challenging the zoning drawn up in 1984, the current management plan must be adapted here and there to comply with the provisions of the framework legislation on protected areas. The old management plan was based, on the one hand, on zoning, approved within the Park by means of a simple legitimacy inspection carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture and, on the other hand, on

agreements between the Park and the various local municipal authorities--agreements that lent the zoning scheme some substance. In accordance with a provision of the Constitutional Court of 1976, local/village development plans could not be approved without the authority of the Park.

The framework legislation on protected areas has set down temporary measures for parks which already have a management plan. But adaptations are still called for. The adapted plan--or the adaptations of the plan (the difference in meaning is anything but slight)--must be submitted to the obligatory opinion of the Government (legitimacy inspection) and the Regions. The Park Community must also submit an opinion, but this is not binding. Approval of the plan (or rather of the adaptations of the plan) by the regions can be expected to be a very lengthy procedure.

2. Vegetation and flora

The vegetation includes upland meadows, large areas of beech forest, remnants of Corsican pinewood (*Pinus nigra*), several types of montane and sub-montane meadow, common hornbeam woods (*Carpinus betulus* and *Carpinus orientalis*), hop hornbeam woods (*Ostrya carpinifolia*) and flowering ash woods (*Fraxinus ornus*), Turkey oak woods (*Quercus cerris*), downy oak (*Quercus pubescens*) and even some sparse Mediterranean vegetation, surprisingly high up, such as the holm oak (*Quercus ilex*).

As pointed out above, the findings of the biodiversity project, which are more or less definitive, confirm the wealth of flora in the Park, which is home to one third of all Italy's flora. The Park's location at the crossroads of several different floristic influences explains why so many endemic species have been observed.

A new vegetation map has been produced. Compared with the initial map drawn up in the 1960s, this new map has been prepared in a more detailed way, and covers a larger area, including the areas that have been added to the Park. But this new map has not actually been published yet.

3. Fauna

The situation of large mammal populations (bear, wolf, chamois, red deer, roe deer) is reckoned to be developing satisfactorily for all species. The various populations should ordinarily carry on growing, because the grazing or holding capacity has still not nearly been reached, with the possible exception of the wolf, which should stabilize its population at around 50 individuals, for the whole Park, due to its pack-based social structure.

The natural presence in the Park of the lynx, long regarded as hypothetical, is now proven, and the population is estimated at 8-10 individuals.

Qualitatively speaking, it should be underlined that the local forms of large mammals typically occurring in Abruzzi, long cut off from any contact with populations in the Alps and the rest of Europe, do in fact turn out to be either sub-species or, alternatively, distinct species. This is the case with the Abruzzi bear, the Abruzzi chamois, the Apennine wolf, and the lynx (1999 report).

Wild boar are present in considerable numbers and are significantly culled by wolves. Hunting in the peripheral area is organized by local hunting associations (Aziende faunistiche venatorie). Wildlife management is satisfactory and poaching effectively prevented by local people. Wild boar hunts are only allowed in less vulnerable regions, and in the presence of Park observers (6-8 hunters, no more than two wild boar per hunt).

4. Forest and pasture

Much of the forest is fully protected. A few areas are still logged, in line with park instructions and only for local use (firewood). The use of other energy forms--gas, in particular--is encouraged by the Park. This should further ease pressure on the forest. The imminent installation of piping for natural gas will further reduce this pressure. Conversely, use of the biomass for energy purposes for the Park facilities--a use which will tally with the Park's self-appointed task of providing ecological education--does not seem to be on the agenda. It would be seen as being in contradiction with policy involving user right limitations with regard to wood felling ("uso civico" here considered as "abuso civico").

The Park continues to lease woodland and pasture to ten municipal authorities and to compensate for the repudiation of user rights. This expenditure item takes up a large share of the Park budget (around 15% of its forestry budget).

Cooperation with the forestry department is still unsatisfactory. On top of the problem already referred to, to do with the transfer of the forest reserve to the authority of the Park, the situation involving the functional--but non-hierarchic--answerability of forest rangers to the Park lies at the root of major sticking points. I did not manage to meet any representative of the forestry department during this appraisal, so the viewpoint of this department is not a known quantity. It can only be hoped that these issues of answerability will be sorted out and that a better cooperation between the different authorities will be introduced, focusing on the aims and goals of the Park.

5. Agriculture

The traditional use of highland pasture continues but less extensively, either because of abandonment or because the Park rents areas suited to the chamois.

Large areas of hay meadows and open land have been abandoned. The main reasons for this are the unprofitability of farming relatively marginal land, a lack of motivation among younger people and the lack of official support.

An increase in forested areas is not a negative factor, but also means that, in the medium term, there will be a certain loss of diversity, a homogenisation of the landscape, disappearance of crop-associated species such as hemerophilous plants, as well as a reduction in food sources for wildlife. Currently, the zones that the forest is in the process of regaining are favourable to large mammals, but a loss of general diversity is foreseeable once the beech forest has become re-established. In the years to come, it will in all probability be necessary to adopt more active forest management measures designed to maintain or step up biodiversity. The introduction of this kind of management is currently coming up against matters of principle which can also be linked with the situation of rivalry between the National Park and the Forestry Department. The Park should nevertheless embark on certain avenues of research with a view to optimising beech forest management with regard to the target of biodiversity maintenance.

The "Programma Alimentazione Fauna", a scheme designed to encourage farmers to grow crops likely to attract bears, with compensation for any damage caused by these creatures, has been in operation now for 31 years, and has proved popular and useful.

6. Built heritage

The beauty and harmony of the old villages make a noteworthy contribution to the Park's landscape and the upkeep of local traditions. The Park continues to encourage the conservation and restoration of this cultural heritage, and contributes to it itself by way of its policy aimed at providing Visitor Centres in buildings that are part and parcel of this cultural heritage.

V. EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

The Abruzzi National Park is well-known for its advanced education and information programmes, and the presence of an information centre in practically every village, including theme museums and enclosures where native mammals, typically found in the Park, live in semi-liberty and can be easily observed.

The idea is that each local community should focus on one animal and one typical plant.

The table below gives an overview of the impressive growth in activity in this sector since 1980:

Education and Information in the Abruzzi, Latium and Molise National Park	
Year	Visitors
Visitors involved with the Educational Dept	
Park inhabitants taking part in activities	
Visitor centres	
Area offices	
Discovery centres	
Service centres	
Educational Dept. permanent and seasonal personnel	
Volunteers	

(Source: Flavia Caruso--Report of the Education, Interpreting and Communications Dept--May, 2001).

Visitors to the Park come mainly from towns and cities (both Rome and Naples are relatively close). The number of foreign visitors is on the rise, but currently only accounts for 10% of the total number of visitors.

The Visitor Centres are located in the different villages in the Park and include, in differing degrees, one or more of the following features: museum, area office, wildlife area, discovery centre, nature garden and recreational area.

The Area Offices provide information about the Park, organize visits and guided tours, issue special permits, and sell Park documentation and products.

The two Service Centres are the International Centre and the La Camosciara Centre. They organize various educational and informational activities, and are used to accommodate volunteers and foreign visitors.

The Discovery Centres are used for educational activities for groups, schools, and so on.

From July to November walks in the three Park valleys with the largest number of chamois may only be undertaken in the company of a guide. There is an admission fee (15,000 lire, 7.75) and a limit of 50 persons a day in each of the three valleys. Given the number of visitors to the park (more than 2 million per annum), these restrictions seem to be very constricting, not to say discouraging.

The Park's Educational Department organizes a comprehensive series of activities for visitors of all types and ages. It also holds training courses for guides and Park associates.

As a result of the "Nature Volunteers" programme, teams made up of young people who are especially motivated and well trained contribute much valuable and effective assistance to the Park management.

Volunteer schemes in the Park are developing apace. They can be split up into five programmes respectively called: On the Nature Front, Nature Camps, Volunteers without Frontiers, Senior Citizen Volunteers, and Volunteers for the Future. In the year 2000, 200 volunteers (out of 3,000 applicants) worked in the Park at tasks such as rubbish collection, public assistance, staking out paths and trails, Park inspections, providing information for visitors, mountain rescue, cultural events, and so on. Volunteers are unpaid, have an average age of 26, and are usually students (60%). 5% of them come from abroad.

Information and education activities thus play an important part in Park activities, Topics dealt with go well beyond the confines of the Park itself, and extend to nature conservancy in the broadest sense, as well as to the environment in general.

Since the last Diploma renewal in 1997, it should also be mentioned that, at Villetta Barrea, the Park hosted the Conference organized by the Council of Europe from 8-10 June 1997, on the theme "Protected areas: model territories for general nature conservancy". This conference, at which those in charge of the Abruzzi National Park made considerable contributions, brought together more than fifty attendees. The exemplary character of the Abruzzi National Park was emphasized on many an occasion.

The Park has a website (www.pna.it), the wealth and quality of whose contents are worth stressing. This very attractive site is definitely a model worth copying. The information in it is accessible in Italian and English, and contains a general description of the park, more detailed descriptions about the natural environment, and the fauna and flora, and very well prepared files on the main species of fauna and flora, as well as on the different villages and communes situated within the Park--an impressive amount of very useful practical data. The only regrettable thing--at a pinch--might be that the European Diploma--which is duly mentioned in the background description of the Park--does not feature in a more conspicuous way--for example using its logo on the banner page of the site.

VI. RESEARCH

The Centre for Scientific Study in the Apennines, in Pescasseroli, runs--in the broadest sense of the term--all fauna and flora management in the Park. Its programmes include monitoring logging practices and grazing patterns, and arranging compensation for damage caused by wildlife. The Department handles, among other things, scientific research, fauna inventories, wildlife management, and wildlife health inspections.

In the year 2000, no less than 35 scientific research projects (mainly involving fauna) were carried out in the National Park. The research carried out in the Park also culminated in 14 doctoral theses in 2000. Foreign researchers are also involved in these research projects.

The Scientific Department has also dealt with the coordination and logistical back-up for the "Biodiversity Project" launched in 1993, the purpose of which was to inventory all the fauna and flora species occurring within the Park confines, and in the outer protection area. As of 31 March 2001, this inventory listed 8,217 species, which represents one third of all Italy's biodiversity! This biodiversity breaks down as follows:

Vertebrates: 348 species, including:

- Mammals:	66
- Birds:	230
- Reptiles:	16
- Amphibians:	12
- Fish:	24

Invertebrates: 5,028 species, incl. 4,765 species of insects

Plants: 2,841 species, incl. 2,001 species of higher plants.

VII. RELATIONS WITH LOCAL VILLAGES

Relations are good to excellent with almost all the villages in the Park. But they do still seem to be somewhat tricky with the village of Pescasseroli, where the Park headquarters are located. This village's plans for ski pistes, plus the challenge mounted against the Park management plan, in particular, are aggravating these already poor relations.

VIII. EXTENSION AND EXTENSION PROJECTS

A decree issued by the Minister of the Environment has recently enlarged the Park by including two areas of major ecological significance:

- a. The Giovenco river valley: 4,200 ha of forest, pasture and fields, which the local community itself asked to be incorporated in the Park.
- b. the Campitelli-Lagozzo-Montagna Spaccata area: a very important 2,700-hectare sector with forest, clearings and ponds, home to the most valued wildlife, including the brown bear and the Abruzzi chamois, the Apennine wolf and the rare Lilford woodpecker.

The Park extension project to the Alfedena area is still coming up against many obstacles, despite the fact that this is a special protection area, because of the Region's pusillanimous and rather passive attitude (1999 report).

IX. FOLLOW-UP OF PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Guarantee a definite budget drawn up in good time and the payment of sufficient funds, given the enlargement of the Park area, within deadlines geared to adequate and long-term management.

It is impossible to pronounce any definitive verdict about the adequacy of current funding, which is substantial, but still does not permit the execution of the many projects pending.

There is still the problem of delays, but this goes well beyond the specific case of the Abruzzi Park.

2. Obtain a clearly defined status, with long-term guarantees, and shed light on the role and responsibilities of the Forestry Corps personnel working in the Park.

Despite the fact that the new Law approved in December 1998 provides for putting the powers of Park Rangers and the powers of Forest Rangers on an equal footing, the full application of this provision is still encountering one or two problems, in particular on the part of the Prefect (1999 report). The functional--but not hierarchic--answerability of forest rangers to the Park lies at the root of certain real problems. Additional difficulties are entailed by the obligatory certification of rangers by the Prefects of the three regions in which the Park is located.

3. Actively seek an agreement with the authorities concerned about forest reserve management, by applying the provisions of the framework legislation on protected areas.

It is sad to note, seven years after the adoption of the new Framework Legislation on Protected Areas, that the "Feudo-Intramonti" Full Forest Reserve, located actually within the Park, has still not been transferred to the Ente Autonomo, as is clearly stipulated by the provisions in force. The Park has lodged complaints on several occasions, but has never had any cooperation whatsoever from the Forestry Department (1999 annual report).

4. Continue strictly to apply the laws and regulations to do with land development (constructions, camping etc.).

The Park has won many legal battles to do with its powers to control and monitor town-planning and construction projects, specifically with regard to the on-going efforts by the village of Pescasseroli to over-develop peripheral constructions, which do not comply with any boundaries (1999 report).

However, many attempts to sidestep legislation and regulations have been noted, and it is difficult to effectively monitor activities such as rough camping.

5. Ban traffic on roads and tracks wherever nature and wildlife conservation justifies such measures, particularly on the La Camosciara road, and make sure that the Pescasseroli-Bisegna road is effectively closed.

After decades of legal battles, the return of the La Camosciara valley to its natural state marks a considerable success, this valley being located in the heart of the Park, and the site where the first Nature Reserve in Italy was created on 2 October 1921. The Park has managed to have the road closed day and night, and there is selective access on foot or on horseback (1999 annual report).

A plan to restore this site and its environs has already been drawn up.

6. Guarantee the long-term protection of water resources both quantitatively, by avoiding excessive use, and qualitatively, by encouraging improved waste water treatment in the villages situated in the Park.

Progress has already been made. As the result of a new law, a minimum water flow is guaranteed. There is a project to set up a phyto-purification station in the Giovenco valley. The issue of water quality during the busy tourist season is still a real problem, because the existing stations do not have sufficient capacity to handle peak periods of waste water production, as observed in summer.

7. Find solutions making it possible to regalanize and support traditional farming, especially in the Giovenco valley.

The Giovenco area has been included in the Park. At the present time, there are several activities in progress, aimed at providing a tangible aspect to this enlargement, in particular the recent creation of the Insect Centre at Bisegna, and the current creation of the Green Centre (themes: organic farming, eco-gardening, forest and mixed countryside (bocage) at Ortola di Marsi. Farm conversion schemes (fruit trees, honey) are under way.

8. Maintain and, as required, develop the role of the Park's offices in Rome as a showcase for the Park as well as a promotion and coordination centre with the national powers-that-be and other protected areas.

The Latium (Lazio) region makes a financial contribution both for the upkeep of the offices in Rome and for the development of activities in that part of the Park located within its boundaries. It is a fact that the location of the Rome offices is contested by the Abruzzi Region, but it can be noted that the fact that this location is expressly stipulated by the framework legislation is a sufficient guarantee.

9. Strictly comply with the conditions for granting the European Diploma, in particular the submission of annual reports on the situation of the Park.

Those in charge of the Park explain the recently noted delays on the one hand by the absence of any management agency over a prolonged period of time and, on the other, by poor linkage between the deadlines when the reports are due and the availability of data required for preparing said reports. It is clear that the writing of the annual reports represents a relatively demanding and non-productive administrative formality when compared with the management of other Park activities. All the same, it is a basic condition for granting the Diploma. Abandoning this requirement cannot be entertained--it would come across as a sign of lack of interest on the part of the Council of Europe for areas with diplomas.

This summary thus prompts me to suggest that some of the recommendations put forward in 1997 (and sometimes as far back as 1992, and even earlier) should be once again taken up, *mutatis mutandis*, at the next renewal of the European Diploma. This suggestion applies in particular to recommendations no. 1 (budgetary delays), no. 2 (the part to do with the role and responsibilities of forest rangers), no.3 (transfer of the forest reserve), no.4 (application of legislation and rules), no.6 (the part to do with water quality), and no. 9 (annual reports).

X. OTHER PROBLEMS PENDING

1. **Approval of the adaptations made to the management plan.**

Adaptations to the management plan must be made on the basis of the provisions of the framework legislation on protected areas. These adaptations have been prepared by the Park and must now be approved by the various authorities. Every effort should be made for the Park to have swift access to a management plan that complies with the framework legislation.

2. Consolidation of the Park's achievements

The Park undeniably has to its credit a series of altogether impressive achievements to do with nature conservation (in particular the re-establishment of large mammal populations), nature-friendly economic development and public information and education programmes. These achievements can be put down to the Park management's ambitious, dynamic and proactive policy, which can be justly proud of the current success of the Abruzzi National Park. The implementation of such an ambitious policy has also and inevitably been at the root of several areas of tension, not to say conflict, with national, regional, provincial and local authorities, and with other public services such as the Forestry Corps. Against such a backdrop, nothing is ever gained for good, and there is cause to fear that a change of cast--inevitable in due course--in the Park management may usher in certain challenges to the situation as is.

So there is good reason to consolidate the gains made over these past thirty years by establishing all the factors which will make it possible to continue this ambitious policy over the long term, in the form of people who will be its standard-bearers in the years to come. This undoubtedly means that as broad as possible an agreement be obtained with regard to the provisions of the management plan; it also implies that special heed be paid to the choice of future managerial staff, who will have a particularly exacting heritage to deal with. In my view, it is important to draw the attention of the Italian authorities to this point, albeit in very general terms.

3. Biodiversity conservation by way of active beech forest management

Attention has been drawn on more than one occasion to the risk of biodiversity loss associated with the spread of forest areas to the detriment of other land uses (agriculture, grazing). The current management plan--which consists essentially in a hands-off policy--is aggravating this risk of biodiversity loss. More hands-on forest management experiments aimed at conserving or increasing biodiversity should be introduced by the Park's scientific department.

XI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Abruzzi National Park is still an area of outstanding value. Apart from the protection of high-quality sites, it offers a noteworthy example of how to manage a protected area near large urban centres, accommodating large numbers of visitors and preserving a viable population of large mammals such as bears and wolves.

The Park is also a very interesting model of how to maintain as satisfactory as possible an equilibrium between wildlife protection and local development; it also provides a good example of how to formulate information and education programmes.

Given the existing situation, the expert recommends that the European Diploma be renewed for a further five-year period, attaching the following recommendations, designed mainly to support the efforts already undertaken by the Park's officials.

1. Ensure that adequate funding be guaranteed on a long time basis, and that funds be made available in good time to undertake adequate and long-term management.
2. Take rapid steps to approve the alterations to the management plan that are laid down by the framework legislation on protected areas.
3. Take all necessary steps to consolidate, in the long term, the Park's achievements and gains, in particular by guaranteeing that the policy in effect will be on-going, through the choice of the future Park director.
4. Clarify the responsibilities and answerability of the Forestry Corps personnel working in the Park.
5. Carry out the transfer of responsibility for the management of forest reserves, in compliance with the provisions of the framework legislation on protected areas.
6. Continue strictly to apply the legislation and regulations to do with land development (constructions, camping etc.).
7. Guarantee long-term water quality protection, by encouraging improved waste water treatment in the villages located in the Park and by adapting the tourist load to the existing treatment capacities.
8. Carry out experiments required to develop forest management measures aimed at conserving beech forest biodiversity.
9. Strictly comply with the conditions for granting the European Diploma, in particular the on-time submission of the annual reports describing the situation of the Park.

Appendix I

ABRUZZI, LATIUM AND MOLISE NATIONAL PARK--IDENTITY CARD

Creation: in 1922, as a private initiative; legal status in 1923.

Responsible authority: Ente Autonomo Parco nazionale d'Abruzzo, Lazio e Molise

Area: 50,228 ha (76,029 ha buffer zone)

Regions concerned: Abruzzi, Latium, Molise

Villages concerned (by geographical area: Pescasseroli, Opi, Villetta Barrea, Civitella Alfedena, Barrea and Alfedena (Alto Sangro); Bisegna, Gioia dei Marsi, Lecce nei Marsi and Villavallalonga (Marsica Fucense); Scanno (Valle del Saggitario); Alvito, Compoli Appennino, San Donato Val Comino, Settefrati, Picinisco and San Biagio Saracinisco (Val de Comino); Pizzone, Castel San Vincenzo, Rochetta a Volturno, Scapoli and Filignano (Mainarde).

Water-courses: Sangro, Melfa, Giovenco and Volturno

Lakes: Barrea, Vivo, Montagna Spaccata, Pantaniello, Castel San Vincenzo, and Selva

Mountains: Petroso (2,249 m), Marsicano (2,245 m), Greco (2,285 m) and Meta (2,242 m.)

Visitors: more than 2,000,000 per annum

Area owned by the Park : approx 400 ha

Managed forest and pasture: approx 20,000 ha

Strictly controlled nature reserves: approx 4,000 ha

Flora: approx. 2,000 species of vascular plants

Fauna:

- 60 species of mammals, 230 species of birds, 60 species of amphibians, reptiles and fish
- Abruzzi bear: 70-100 individuals
- Abruzzi chamois: 600-700 individuals
- Red deer: 500-600 individuals
- Roe deer: 500-600 individuals
- Apennine wolf: 40-50 individuals
- Lynx: 8-10 individuals

Employees: approx 80 permanent staff, approx 120 temporary staff, 120 miscellaneous associates

Volunteers: approx 2,000 per annum

Income for local authorities: approx 300 billion lire (155 million) per annum financial input

Budget: approx 10 billion lire (5.16 million).

Appendix II

RESOLUTION (97) 17 ON THE RENEWAL OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA AWARDED TO THE ABRUZZI NATIONAL PARK (ITALY)

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 30 September 1997
at the 602nd meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.a of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Having regard to Resolution (65) 6 instituting the European Diploma;

Having regard to Resolution (67) 39 awarding the European Diploma to the Abruzzi National Park;

Having regard to the proposals of the Bureau of the Committee for the Activities of the Council of Europe in the field of Biological and Landscape Diversity (BU-DBP),

Renews the European diploma, awarded to the Abruzzi National Park in category B, until 26 October 2002;

Strongly reiterates the first recommendation made on the occasion of the previous renewal (Resolution (92) 7) to "apply strictly the obligation to provide the annual reports in due time";

Attaches to the renewal the following recommendations to:

1. ensure that a budget is agreed on time and sufficient funding is paid, taking into account the enlargement of the park's surface area, and that deadlines are met so that the park can be properly managed in the long term;
2. take steps to clarify rangers' status, and give them long-term security, and properly clarify the role and responsibilities of the forestry staff working in the park;
3. actively seek an agreement with the forest authorities in accordance with the provisions of the framework legislation on protected areas;
4. continue to apply planning laws and regulations (for building, camping sites, etc) strictly;
5. ban traffic from roads, trails and paths wherever wildlife and fauna protection so requires, in particular on the Camosciara road, and properly ban traffic from the Pescasseroli Pratorosso-Bisegna road;
6. guarantee the long-term protection of water supplies both in quantitative terms, avoiding excessive use, and in qualitative terms, by encouraging improvements to the treatment of waste water in villages located within the park;
7. find solutions to the problems of revitalising and supporting traditional agriculture, particularly in the Giovenco Valley;
8. retain and, if necessary, develop the role of the head office in Rome as a shop-window for the park and as a centre for promotion and co-ordination with the national authorities and other protected areas;
9. strictly observe the conditions of the award of the European diploma, in particular that of sending annual progress reports on the park.

Appendix III

Draft resolution
on the renewal of the European Diploma
awarded to the Abruzzi National Park (Italy)

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.a of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Having regard to Resolution (65) 6 instituting the European Diploma,

Having regard to Resolution (67) 39 awarding the European Diploma to the Abruzzi National Park (Italy),

Taking into consideration the expert report submitted at the meeting of the Group of Specialists--European Diploma for Protected Areas of 28 and 29 January 2002,

Having regard to the proposals of the Committee for the Activities of the Council of Europe in the field of Biological and Landscape Diversity (CO-DBP),

Renews the European Diploma awarded to the Abruzzi National Park (Italy) until 26 November 2007,

Attaches to the renewal the following recommendations, designed mainly to support the efforts already undertaken by the Park officials:

1. Ensure that adequate funding be guaranteed on a long time basis, and that funds be made available in good time to undertake adequate and long-term management.
2. Take rapid steps to approve the alterations to the management plan that are laid down by the framework legislation on protected areas.
3. Take all necessary steps to consolidate, in the long term, the Park's achievements and gains, in particular by guaranteeing that the policy in effect will be on-going, through the choice of the future Park director.
4. Clarify the responsibilities and answerability of the Forestry Corps personnel working in the Park.
5. Carry out the transfer of responsibility for the management of forest reserves, in compliance with the provisions of the framework legislation on protected areas.
6. Continue strictly to apply the legislation and regulations to do with land development (constructions, camping etc.).
7. Guarantee long-term water quality protection, by encouraging improved waste water treatment in the villages located in the Park and by adapting the tourist load to the existing treatment capacities.
8. Carry out experiments required to develop forest management measures aimed at conserving beech forest biodiversity.
9. Strictly comply with the conditions for granting the European Diploma, in particular the on-time submission of the annual reports describing the situation of the Park.