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# ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2018

Spitz / 7.12.2018 / IH / BM / HS

State: Austria

Name of the area: Wachau

Year and number of years since the award or renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas:  
Awarded 1994, last renewal 2009, years since the last renewal: 9

### Central authority concerned:

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### Authority responsible for its management:

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## 1. Conditions

**Condition #1: The scheme to build a dam on the Danube at Dürnstein has to be abandoned definitely, as well as a similar scheme within and immediately downstream from the area covered by the diploma:**

This condition has been totally fulfilled since many years. No such plan has recently been discussed nor has any action taken place to create such plans or schemes.

## 2. Recommendations

### **Recommendation #1: The existence of the Jauerling protected zone should continue to be guaranteed**

The Nature Park still continues its work independently from our institution. In 2017 the *Verein Naturpark Jauerling-Wachau* has been opened in the central Nature Park municipality Maria Laach, which is also used as a tourism office. Among many other efforts to maintain the characteristics of the zone they have established various educational programmes around nature issues: [www.naturpark-jauerling.at](http://www.naturpark-jauerling.at)

### **Recommendation #2: The river should be maintained at its present level, guaranteeing the survival of the last alluvial forests**

The last big reconnection project (LIFE Auenwildnis Wachau) of old side branches of the Danube to the main river could – due to minor legal agreements – still not be finished this year. However, plans are ready so that the project will be continued and hopefully finished in winter 2019/2020.

Also, two public alluvial forest islands (Pritzenau and Schönbühel island, together 50 ha) shall become nature conservation areas until 2020.

The restoration of autochthonous alluvial forests has also been continued this year with thousands of girdled non-autochthonous trees which have been replaced by autochthonous trees like Black Poplar. Additional breeding ponds for amphibia especially *Bombina bombina* and *Triturus dobrogicus* have been created, although we had to face the problem of the unusual drought periods also this year.

The volunteer cooperation called “Big Five Volunteers” together with the two National Parks in Lower Austria, the Wienerwald Biosphere Reserve and the newly listed World Natural Heritage wilderness area Dürrenstein has been very successful and will be continued until 2020.

As mentioned in last year’s report, we are participating in the DTP Interreg project DANUBEparksCONNECTED, which started in January 2017. Amongst other issues, we have taken up the job to be responsible for a general framework study on how to connect wilderness islands all along the Danube. At the upcoming general assembly in December this year, possible future projects regarding the Wild Islands-project will be discussed.

### **Recommendation #3: Work on restoration of the terraces and integration of the irrigation network should continue**

As long as winegrowing stays as successful in the regions as it is, the vintners will continue to restore the terraces. Concerning the watering systems, the few remaining metal tubes will be constantly replaced by black rubber tubes almost not visible in the landscape. New tubes, imbedded about 8cm into the earth, are already being tested.

### **Recommendation #4: Strict standards should be imposed on river tourism traffic, to ensure that it meets appropriate quality requirements for the Wachau**

As mentioned in last year’s report, the high load of river tourism was especially problematic in the cities of Dürnstein, Weißenkirchen and Melk. This year, a survey among guests and citizens as well as a visitor census was conducted in Dürnstein from July to November. The results will be presented in January 2019 and then further steps and measure will follow, to achieve regional and local added value. Furthermore, plans for strategic visitor guidance and control of visitor movements shall be worked out.

**Recommendation #5: The refurbishment of the Spitz quarry should finally be started; works should be staggered until 2019**

No changes to the previous year. The quarry is held stable and protected, which is guaranteed by the Lower Austrian Federal Government.

**Recommendation #6: The mouflon population should be brought within a limit compatible with natural regeneration of the forest, without systematic recourse to protection fences**

No major changes to the previous year. As discussed in 2016, the main problem is still that mouflons are difficult to hunt because they are very mobile and are constantly moving from one district to another (Melk and Krems).

In order to protect the young low-grown forests from mouflons and other forest animals, the use and installation of protection fences is necessary. Especially after this year's high loss of spruce forests caused by bark beetles. Hence the rockfall problem along the B33 road (on the southern bank of the Danube) is still an issue.

**Recommendation #7: Efforts should be continued to preserve the apricot orchards**

All responsible institutions have continued working along the strategic and operative schedules presented in the last annual reports. No specific projects have been reported. The apricot visitor and competency center around the monastery of Göttweig is very successful and constantly increases visitor numbers. As much as the apricot tree nursery, where certified clones of typical regional apricot varieties are cultivated and sold. This is very important for the preservation of this local fruit cultivation.

**Recommendation #8: Steps should be taken to ensure that consultation on how to protect the Wachau against flooding takes place in cooperation with the local authorities concerned, in order to avoid separating the river from the hinterland by a substantial dyke**

The flood protection in the municipality of Emmersdorf was completed this year. The constructions in Aggsbach Dorf and the municipality of Aggsbach Markt are currently put up. As in all the other villages before, this planning has involved the local stakeholders. The communities are being supported by the government of Lower Austria and the Republic of Austria.

### **3. Site management**

Since March 2017 the UNESCO site management plan has been implemented and can be downloaded at [http://www.weltkulturerbe-wa-chau.at/fileadmin/Bibliothek/projects/\\_Projekte/WachauProjekte/ManagementPlanWorldHeritageWachau\\_20170710.pdf](http://www.weltkulturerbe-wa-chau.at/fileadmin/Bibliothek/projects/_Projekte/WachauProjekte/ManagementPlanWorldHeritageWachau_20170710.pdf)

The fundamental strategic and operative guidelines both for the World Heritage and the European Diploma are very well explained in the plan. One of the six key fields of the management strategy is nature protection. Currently 1 ½ people are working for the immediate site management. The management office, including the implementation of core projects, is financed by the Republic of Austria, the responsible department of the Office of the Lower Austrian Federal Government and the Welterbegemeinden Wachau association, consisting of all 15 Wachau municipalities within the World Heritage.

Specific plans and collaborations dealing with nature protection in the region are described in chapter 3 (recommendation #2).

#### **4. Boundaries**

No changes in 2018.

#### **5. Other information**

Information on the European Diploma can now be found at <http://www.weltkulturerbe-wachau.at/naturschutz/europadiplom/> The website will be finally translated into English in 2019.

For the past 14 years the Wachau was not visited by an expert, so we were more than pleased to welcome Dr. Peter Skoberne who was visiting the Wachau from September 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Hopefully, after a successful renewal of the diploma, we will be able to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the European Diploma for Protected Areas in 2019.

#### **6. Natural heritage (general abiotic description: geomorphology, geology and hydrogeology, habitats, flora, fauna, landscape) – State of conservation**

The Wachau valley is one of the last two free-flowing sections of the Austrian Danube. Geologically it belongs to the Bohemian Massif. Important habitats are the dry grassland areas, near natural wood and the Danube with its side arms. Wachau has a very high biodiversity in flora and fauna.

##### 6.1. Environment: changes or deterioration in the environment, of natural or anthropogenic origin, accidental or permanent, actual or anticipated

No changes.

##### 6.2. Flora and vegetation: changes in the plant population and in the vegetational cover; presumed causes.

No relevant change. In the last extremely dry summer some trees in steep, rocky areas died.

##### 6.3. Fauna: changes in the sedentary or migratory populations; congregating, egg-laying and breeding grounds.

No relevant changes. This year *Saga Pedo* was found in two new areas. The population of sandpiper increases because of the new gravel islands and side arms.

#### **7. Cultural heritage and socio-economic context**

##### 7.1. Cultural heritage

This year, after a public tender, a team of experts was assigned to develop a regional mission statement for building structure and landscape design in the Wachau, finishing with binding building standards, called "Leitbild Bauen in der Wachau".

##### 7.1.1. Changes concerning cultural heritage

No changes.

##### 7.2. Socio-economic context

The current Leader program period is still lasting until 2020. Since its start in 2014 about 2.15 Million EUR have been granted and 34 projects have been accepted by the local action group. Leader projects are still a successful motor in motivating people to realize regional projects and hence, push the local development.

#### 7.2.1. Changes concerning the socio-economic context

No changes.

### **8. Education and scientific interest**

#### 8.1. Visitors – Information policy

The Wachau tourism signage system was updated and revised within the last year.

The World Heritage Trail and the Jauerling Trail called “Jauerling Runde” are the most famous trails in the region and are highly frequented every year.

##### 8.1.1. Arrangements for receiving and informing the public (building, booklets, maps, cards, etc.)

The open-air World Heritage Centre at Krems will be updated and complemented with new information and pictures next year. Various touristic cards and maps of the region were updated (Dunkelsteinerwald Trail 2018).

##### 8.1.2. Frequentation by visitors and behavior (number, distribution in time and space)

Visitor numbers are constantly increasing, in 2017 the Donau Niederösterreich Tourismus office published 660.000 booked nights. The north side of the Danube is still more frequented, high season remains from March to October. (see also recommendation #4)

##### 8.1.3. Special visits (distinguished persons, groups, etc.)

In 2017 the annual conference of the Austrian UNESCO World Heritage Sites took place at Wachau.

#### 8.2. Scientific research

Together with the Danube University, in 2017, scientific research was started to implement a building handbook for the region.

##### 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.)

An inventory of Black Poplar was done the last two years, also an inventory of amphibians of Wachau and measures were worked out.

##### 8.2.2. Scientific publications

No publications in 2018 (only short articles in local media)

### **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)

No changes.

### **10. Site management (management plans, budget and personnel)**

#### 10.1. Improvements made

Implementation of the UNESCO site management plan since March 2017.

##### 10.1.1. Ecological action affecting the flora and biotopes; controls of fauna

Important dry grassland areas in Wachau get managed every year or every second year with the help of volunteers and with professionals.

#### 10.1.2. Protection against the elements (fire, water regime)

Flood protection construction work was continued in some villages. Melk and Emmersdorf finished their installations. Schönbühel-Aggsbach will be done in 2019. Schallemsdorf will start works next year.

#### 10.1.3. Approaches and thoroughfares (paths, roads, car parks, signposting, fencing, etc.)

Currently the Dürnstein tunnel, is being renovated and therefore closed until the end of March 2019. The main Wachau road is now led between the Danube and the rock, alongside the cycle path, which has been broadened on short-term measure.

#### 10.1.4. Field equipment (hides and study facilities)

No changes known.

#### 10.1.5. Waste management

No changes.

#### 10.1.6. Use of renewable energy systems

No changes. Unfortunately, the expected energy sources of the project "Stromboje" could still not be realized.

### 10.2. Management

Since September 18<sup>th</sup> a new site manager has taken over. (see point 3.)

#### 10.2.1. Administrative department: changes made

During the last year the Leader management has become a department on its own with a new Leader manager next to the World Heritage manager. The position of the assistant is divided into 20h/week for World Heritage management assistance and 20h/week for assisting the Leader manager.

#### 10.2.2. Wardens' department: changes made

No changes.

#### 10.2.3. Internal policing measures

No changes.

#### 10.2.4. Infringement of regulations and damage; legal action

Nothing known.

## **11. Influence of the award of the European Diploma for Protected Areas**

The public awareness of the importance and the influence of the European Diploma for protected areas in the region is limited. We hope to reach recognition on a broader community level through special awareness programmes at local schools and a festivity for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Diploma.