



Strasbourg, 16 June 2025

T-PVS/DE(2025)06 final

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Group of Specialists on the European Diploma for Protected Areas

GRANADA DECLARATION

adopted by managers of Diploma holding areas in Granada, Spain, on 22 May 2025

The creation of the European Diploma for Protected Areas in 1965 represents a milestone in the Council of Europe's commitment to the preservation of the continent's natural heritage. Recognising the need to identify and preserve areas of vital importance, the award distinguishes protected natural or semi-natural areas of an exceptional European interest for the conservation of biological, geological and geomorphological diversity in all its components, and the European landscape as a cultural value. The Diploma is awarded to them by virtue of their scientific, cultural or aesthetic interest if they have an appropriate protection system, eventually also in conjunction with programmes of action for sustainable development, thus at the same time representing an important contribution to the Pan-European Ecological Network.

Sixty years later, the Diploma's community has grown to include 66 protected areas in 27 European countries¹. Representing a range of exceptional natural sites, the Diploma has also become a very dynamic community mobilising the managers and the authorities responsible for their protection and conservation. In particular the managers, rangers and ancillary staff working on the ground with experience, devotion and commitment, sometimes in difficult conditions, deserve special recognition. Thanks to their outstanding work, this community has reached an incontestable level of maturity and exemplarity.

To mark the 60th Anniversary of the European Diploma for Protected Areas, a Conference was held in Granada (Spain) on 21 – 22 May 2025 organised by the Council of Europe in cooperation with the Spanish authorities. The event was attended by 72 participants from 24 countries, convening managers of the Diploma holding areas, representatives of national, regional and local authorities, and nature conservation NGOs. Participants had an opportunity to celebrate the progress achieved, to discuss remaining and emerging challenges, and to call for a renewed commitment towards nature conservation.

A number of very positive developments were welcomed at the Conference. These include the recovery or the improvement of the conservation status of species, habitats and ecosystem processes, functions and services, the strengthening of the participation of local communities in the management of protected areas, and the development of communication, educational and awareness raising activities among the general public and specific target groups such as schools and youth. It also stressed the noteworthy contribution of the scientific knowledge as a basic tool for decision making.

At the same time, participants noted with concern that unsolved tensions in the coexistence of protected areas with other land use make it increasingly difficult to implement area-based conservation policies.

Despite the adoption of multilateral international agreements with ambitious targets for mitigating global warming, halting biodiversity loss and drastically reducing pollution, progress remains slow. The need for urgent action led the Council of Europe Heads of State and Government to commit to strengthen the Organisation's work in this area. Therefore, the Reykjavik Declaration adopted at the 4th Summit of the Council of Europe in May 2023 calls for measures to counter the triple planetary crisis of pollution, climate change and loss of biodiversity and its impact on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Diploma has an important role to play in the implementation of the Summit Declaration.

The Council of Europe went also a step further with the adoption in May 2025 of two groundbreaking instruments for a better protection of the environment: a new Convention on the Protection of the Environment through Criminal Law providing the basis for a more coherent criminal justice response by states to environmental crime, including across borders; and a new long-term Council of Europe

¹ Status as of May 2025

Strategy on the Environment aimed at addressing the accelerating environmental crisis through the lens of human rights, democratic governance, and the rule of law. The Secretary General of the Council of Europe also announced a new Democratic Pact for Europe in which environmental protection plays a major role.

There is indeed a clear need for a new impetus to the nature conservation strategy based on protected areas, and the European Diploma can serve undoubtedly to this purpose, contributing to achieving the targets of the Bern Convention and its Vision and Strategic Plan for the period to 2030 as well as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, adopted under the Convention on Biological Diversity, including Target 3 stipulating effective conservation and management of 30 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas and of marine and coastal areas.

Europe's geodiversity and biodiversity in all its components is vital to European citizens and their well-being and quality of life, a critical asset for the conservation of an increasingly threatened natural heritage, and a tool to ensure the sustainable development of the region. Promoting exemplary management of European protected areas, contributes to a cleaner, more sustainable, resilient and diverse environment and guarantees the preservation of natural resources for the future, which in turn will foster a more healthy and peaceful society.

Participants therefore encouraged European countries which have protected areas of exceptional European interest and managed in an exemplary to submit an application for joining the European Diploma. The recent application of the Sierra Nevada National Park, Nature Park and Biosphere Reserve is particularly welcomed, as its inclusion in the community will suppose protection for habitats and species which are so far underrepresented, like those of Mediterranean high-altitude ranges.

The Granada Declaration captures the European Diploma community's commitment and calls for an increase in the number, the diversity and the geographical coverage of the Diploma's protected areas. It also calls for the allocation of resources ensuring their sustainable management and for measures to better integrate these areas' needs in the development and implementation of policies affecting them.

GRANADA DECLARATION

We, managers of Diploma holding areas, meeting on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the European Diploma in Granada, declare the following:

- 1) There is an urgent need to designate more protected areas reaching at least 30 per cent of European terrestrial and inland water areas and of marine and coastal areas, and expand the community of the European Diploma in the coming years. This will help European countries to achieve the Vision and Strategic Plan of the Bern Convention for the period to 2030, the Council of Europe Strategy on the Environment, the objectives of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework adopted under the Convention on Biological Diversity, and fulfil the obligations adopted towards other multilateral international agreements like the Barcelona, Ramsar and Bonn Conventions and its agreements.
- 2) There are clear gaps in the representativeness of the community of the European Diploma, both in terms of geographical coverage and of habitat types and species protected. The marine realm is especially underrepresented as well as areas of geological-palaeontological heritage uniqueness. We encourage Parties to the Bern Convention to designate protected areas and apply for the European Diploma if they haven't done so yet and for natural habitat types and species under or not represented so far, including transnational areas.

- 3) Protected areas are still under financed, and several of them still lack a Management Plan. We invite the responsible authorities to provide the necessary funding to the Diploma holding areas, providing sufficient human and financial resources, and to adopt, implement and regularly monitor and update Management Plans. The scientific knowledge provides crucial basis for decision making and should, therefore, be sufficiently promoted and financed.
- 4) We acknowledge the crucial role of local communities in the sustainable use of the territory and in preserving and promoting local traditions. We commit to actively involve the local communities in the conservation and development of protected areas in a fair, equitable and gender balanced way.
- 5) The environmental crisis we are facing will not be solely solved through the designation of protected areas. Standardised environmental data should inform policies affecting land and waters, like energy, farming, fisheries, transportation, and/or urban development. A comprehensive spatial planning which prioritises environment protection over these sectorial policies is fundamental to achieve the biodiversity targets for the period to 2030.
- 6) We echo the Reykjavik Declaration of Heads of State and Government at the 4th Summit of the Council of Europe who affirmed that human rights and the environment are intertwined and that a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is integral to the full enjoyment of human rights by present and future generations. In this regard, we call for full implementation of the new Council of Europe Strategy on the Environment.
- 7) We invite States to consider signing and ratifying Council of Europe related conventions including the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention), the Landscape Convention (Florence Convention) and the new Convention on the Protection of the Environment through Criminal Law.
- 8) We call on national, regional and local authorities, local communities, nature conservation NGOs, youth, academia and the Council of Europe, to work towards the strengthening and further development of the Diploma's network and community in co-ordination with other existing networks, conservation categories and international and regional organisations, increasing its visibility and impacts, and mobilising the necessary political and financial support and call on the Council of Europe to provide the necessary resources to the environment activities of the Organisation in line with the Reykjavik Declaration. We consider regular expert visits – if possible, on a five-year basis – to be a particularly important tool, as they provide an opportunity to consult on the conservation management of European Diploma sites and highlight their importance to stakeholders and decision-makers.

The participants at the 60th anniversary of the European Diploma ceremony and round-table express their warm thanks to the Regional Government of Andalusia, the Municipality of Granada, the Director of the Sierra Nevada National Park and its staff, the Spanish Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge for their invitation and generous hospitality, as well as to the Council of Europe for its continued support.

Adopted in Granada, Spain, 22 May 2025