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**REPORT
OF THE VISIT OF THE INDEPENDENT EXPERT
TO THE GRAN PARADISO NATIONAL PARK
(Italy)**

14-16 September 2021

-Combined visit also covering Gran Paradiso National Park-

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1. INTRODUCTION

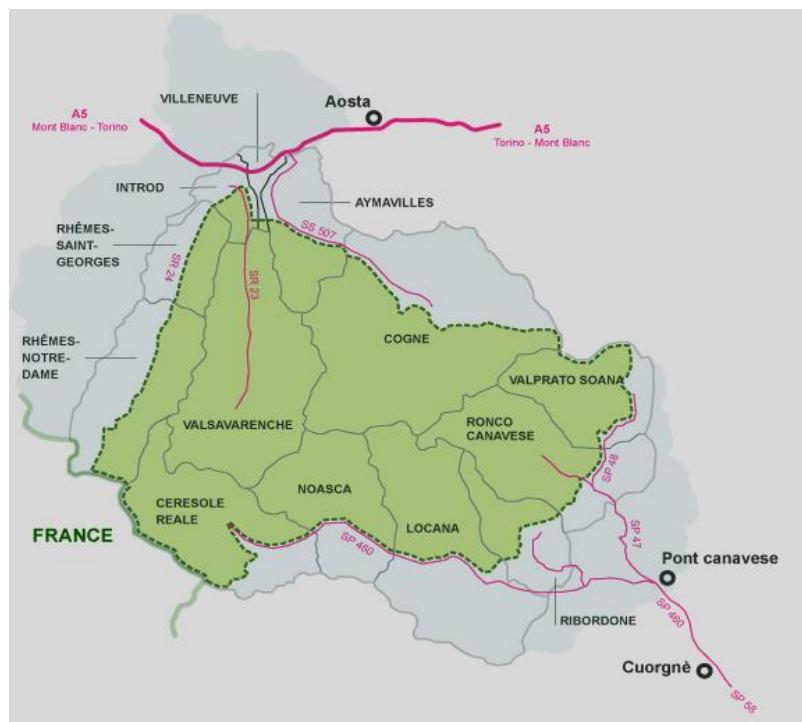
The European Diploma was awarded to the Gran Paradiso National Park in 2006 and renewed in 2012. The Gran Paradiso is closely associated with the Vanoise National Park (hereinafter the Vanoise), which has held the European Diploma since 1976, and their respective diplomas are renewed simultaneously.

This on-the-spot appraisal was carried out on 14-16 September 2021, immediately prior to the visit to the Vanoise, with a view to the upcoming renewal of the respective diplomas. An afternoon meeting with representatives of the two parks in Modane enabled the parks to reactivate their cooperation and opened up prospects for future joint initiatives. The visit, which was perfectly organised, took place under the leadership of Dr Bruno Bassano, Direttore, Ente Parco Nazionale Gran Paradiso, and with several accompanying researchers from the park. A warden and a municipal mayor also contributed to the findings by sharing their respective viewpoints.

The consultant wishes to warmly thank these individuals, as well as the two Vanoise park managers present in Modane, for making themselves available and accompanying him on visits to the offices, to the laboratory and on the ground. He also wishes to emphasise the high quality of the Park's internet site, translated into 4 languages, from which he drew much of the information appearing in this report.

2. SITUATION AND VALUE OF THE PARK

The Gran Paradiso National Park is located in the Alps, in north-east Italy, 50 km N NW of Turin. It is sited, in two almost equal halves, in two regions, Aosta Valley and Piedmont. It was established as Italy's first national park in 1922. It covers 71,043 ha and, together with the adjacent Vanoise National Park in France and several nature reserves that are associated with them (Mont Avic to the east in the case of Gran Paradiso), forms the largest protected area in the western Alps. Its surface area has remained virtually unchanged since it was created, which in 2022 will be 100 years ago. Only a few small densely populated areas (villages) have been excluded from it, but the surface areas lost have been compensated for by extending the Park to take in small wild areas (chiefly chestnut groves). Its management body is the [Ente Parco Nazionale Gran Paradiso](#)



The Gran Paradiso National Park stretches across a vast mountainous area, rising from the 800 metre-high valley floors to the 4 061 metres of the Gran Paradiso summit. With its Larch and Spruce forests, vast alpine grasslands, rock formations and glaciers, the park not only provides an ideal habitat for an abundance of varied

fauna but also represents a classic backdrop in which to discover the universe of the high mountains. The Park's boundaries follow those of the hunting reserve used by the dukes of Savoy, established back in the 18th century.

The Park stretches across the territory of 13 municipalities spread between 4 valleys:

- [Valle Orco](#) and [Valle Soana](#) for the part in the Piedmont region
- [Valle di Cogne](#), [Valsavarenche](#) and [Valle di Rhêmes](#) for the part in the Aosta Valley region

The Park is extended to the east by the Mont Avic Nature Park, whose management is entrusted to the National Park.

The Gran Paradiso National Park and the Vanoise National Park, created in 1922 and 1963 respectively, are the oldest parks in Italy and France. With a common boundary of around 10 kilometres along the Alpine arc, the two parks also share historic, natural and human links that have formed a basis for the twinning of the two reserves (since 1972) and the steering of their actions towards sustainable development and long-term protection. The twinning has resulted in various initiatives: exchanges of wardens to work on monitoring activities and build knowledge of how surveillance services are organised in the two parks, the study of fauna, school exchanges, the production of a leaflet with a map featuring both parks, but it is above all the Alpine Ibex and its preservation which has been the focus of the parks' efforts, with a strong emphasis on joint initiatives.

Geology

The Gran Paradiso range is formed by rock from different periods and origins. In particular it features a complex of stratified gneisses (metamorphic rock derived from granites or diorites that are still present in places). Some of the gneisses are covered by limestone schists that have metamorphosed in different ways, after being left behind by marine sediments from the Mesozoic period. Also noteworthy is the presence of rich seams of iron ore in the Valle di Cogne, which has greatly influenced the lives of the valley communities.

The Park's habitats

The area protected by the Park is a chiefly alpine habitat. The valleys of today are the result of the mountains of the Gran Paradiso range being carved and modelled by massive glaciers and torrents. At lower altitude, the most common trees are Chestnut, Beech, Maple and Linden. In the valley floor forests, the most common trees are Larch, mixed with Red Fir, Swiss Pine and, less frequently, Silver Fir.

Moving up the slopes, the wooded areas are superseded by vast alpine pastures which are covered in flowers at the end of the spring. Thereafter and right up to the 4 061-metre Gran Paradiso summit, the landscape is characterised by rocks and glaciers. With a geology essentially formed by gneisses, the rocky habitats (cliffs, scree etc) are above all favourable to siliceous-soil plants, with only small areas that are home to chalky-soil species and communities.

The alpine pastures are widespread throughout the Park, occupying all the areas above the tree line and covered with herbaceous vegetation forming a more or less continuous grassland. The composition of plant-life is fairly variable and depends on the nature of the substrate and the altitude. Generally speaking, the plants living in these habitats are adapted to the short growing season, the unyielding climate and poor soil. Snow patches are typical at the subalpine and nival levels and there are many of them on the territory of the Park, where snow lies in hollows for much of the year, leaving the ground completely uncovered only for a brief window (one to three months at the most).

The pastures are mostly formed by herbaceous plants, whose composition is heavily influenced by farming practices. They produce silage, which is mown, and are then used for livestock grazing later in the season. Irrigation and organic fertiliser are frequently deployed.

The steppe grasslands are formations of herbaceous vegetation typical of sunlit, arid, rocky slopes, with chiefly grasses growing on permeable ground and poor soil. Steppe grasslands are fairly common in the Park,

especially on the Aosta Valley side. They are to be found at relatively low altitudes and are virtually no longer used by humans except in a few rare cases of grazing, usually involving sheep.

There are few wetlands on the Park's territory, and in some cases they are not even permanent. Very often, the wetlands that do exist are the strips of vegetation bordering lakes and ponds or alpine torrent beds. The peat bogs and marshes are particularly "fragile" from an environmental viewpoint. The Piana del Nivolet area, at an altitude of over 2,500m, is a remarkable example of lakeland and wetland, which is particularly favourable for migratory birds. Far too many wetlands were drained in the past in order to gain new arable land and pastures. Fortunately, nearly all the wetland sites have been placed under official supervision and monitoring in recent years.



Woodland covers roughly 20% of the Park's surface area; it provides all-important refuge for many species, as well as often the only natural defence against natural hazards (landslides, avalanches, floods). There are different types of woodland in the Park, divided into two main groups of differing geographical distribution.

➤ **Deciduous woodland**

The Common Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) is typical for the Piedmont side but totally absent on the Aosta Valley side, which is more arid.

The gorge forests of Maple (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) and Linden (*Tilia platyphyllos*) are to be found here and there in the Park, especially on the northern slopes at low altitude, which are more humid.

The Chestnut groves (*Castanea sativa*) have often been shaped by human intervention, having long been "cultivated" for wood and nuts. Chestnut trees prefer areas with a relatively mild winter climate and do not usually grow above 1000 m. The Park's largest chestnut groves are on the Piedmont side.

Pioneering invasive brush growth, characterised by Aspen, Birch and Hazel, have appeared relatively recently and have developed above all on sunlit slopes previously used for farming and livestock raising.

➤ **Coniferous woodland**

Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) tolerates the arid climate and poor levels of soil nutrients but cannot live alongside other tree species, and therefore forms forests on poor, rocky and south-facing ground, chiefly on the Aosta side.

Spruce (*Picea abies*) is often mixed with Larch, and this is probably the most widespread woodland type in the Park, in the intermediate zone and at subalpine level, up to 1800-2000 m.

The Larch and Swiss Pine forests constitute the "closed" forests which extend as far as the highest altitudes in the western Alps (2200-2300 m). Swiss Pine (*Pinus cembra*) has good cold-resistance and, like the Larch, can reach a considerable age, taking on a bent form. The undergrowth is formed mainly by Ericaceae (Azalea and Blueberry). Pure Larch forests exist only at the pioneer stage; thereafter it is mixed with Spruce and Swiss Pine.

Fauna

The Alpine Ibex is the emblem of the Gran Paradiso Park, which has many of them on its territory today. Other mammals include Chamois, Marmots, Hares, Foxes, Badgers, Ermines, Weasels, Martens and Stone Martens. Birds of prey can often be observed too, such as Eagles, Bearded Vultures (which have recently begun nesting again in the Park), Common Buzzards, Kestrels, Sparrowhawks, Goshawks, Eagle Owls, Tawny Owls, as well as Galliformes, such as Ptarmigan, Black Grouse and Rock Partridge. There are also many species of reptiles, such as vipers, insects, such as the *Parnassius apollo* butterfly, and amphibians, including Newts and Salamanders.

Cultural heritage

Villages and alpine pastures relate the long history of a civilisation of shepherds: self-supporting communities which have lived on these mountains for centuries and had more frequent contact with the inhabitants on the other side of the Alps than with the plain-dwelling population. The dwellings on the Piedmont side are built entirely from stone, whereas wood plays an equally important role on the Aosta side. The most common design, with nuances from valley to valley, is a stone and wood building with a stable on the ground floor, living quarters on the first floor and a barn above them in order to keep as much heat in the dwelling as possible. The Park seeks to highlight the mountain cultural heritage and foster environmentally-friendly economic development.

3. GOALS AND MANAGEMENT OF THE PARK

The **Gran Paradiso National Park** is a protected area established by the State to conserve nationally and internationally important ecosystems of the valleys around the Gran Paradiso massif for present and future generations. The Park's goals are the **management and safeguarding** of the protected area, **preservation** of regional *biodiversity* and landscape, **scientific research, education in the areas of environment and sustainable development**, and **development and promotion of responsible tourism**. (<http://www.pnpg.it/en>)

International recognition

In 2007, thanks to its exceptional natural heritage, good conservation of ecosystems, integration of tourism and farming activities and its role as a transfrontier protected alpine area, the Gran Paradiso National Park was awarded the European Diploma of protected areas by the Council of Europe together with the Vanoise National Park. The twinning of the two parks has resulted in various initiatives.

In 2014, the Park was also put on the IUCN Green List (Italian park only).

The entire territory of the Park corresponds to a Natura 2000 site.

The Park has also signed the European Charter for sustainable development; finally, it has been placed on the list of world heritage sites identified by Italy.

Management of the Park - *ENTE PARCO NAZIONALE GRAN PARADISO*

The Park's management comprises the following organs:

The Executive Council determines the planning strategy and defines which objectives are to be pursued; it also checks, via the Chair, if administrative management is in line with the general directives assigned. It

comprises 13 people appointed by: the Park Community; scientific institutes and the university; environmental protection associations; the regions; the Ministry of the Environment, Land and Sea; the Ministry of Agriculture. It meets 10 times a year. There is an Executive Bureau comprising the Chair and Vice-Chair and one other member.

The Park Community is made up of the mayors of the 13 municipalities which are located wholly or partly on the territory of the Park, the President of the Piedmont region, the President of the Aosta Valley autonomous region, the President of the Province of Turin, the President of the Gran Paradiso mountain community and the President of the Orco and Soana mountain valleys community. It is a body that acts in a consultative capacity and puts forward proposals for the Gran Paradiso National Park; it meets at least twice a year when convened by its Chair and mainly carries out the following tasks:

- it appoints four representatives as members of the Park's Executive Council;
- it decides, in the light of a reasoned assessment of the Park's Executive Council, on the pluriannual economic and social plan, which it submits for approval by the Piedmont and Aosta Regions, monitoring its implementation thereafter;
- it expresses a mandatory opinion on the Park's financial accounts;
- it expresses a mandatory opinion on the park regulations.

It is important to point out that there is no formal scientific committee, as none is provided for in law. That said, a sort of informal scientific committee has been set up with the scientists who work in the Park on a regular basis.

Management of the park

The deputy director is currently acting as director (September 2021); he is to be confirmed in post before the end of the year for a period of five years. Up to now, he was head of the research unit. His current deputy should be confirmed in post as head of research.

Park staff

The plan provides for 88 posts; as vacant posts have not been filled after departures and retirements, there are currently only 67 staff, which is not enough to handle park warden duties and biodiversity monitoring tasks, and this is a matter of concern.

Wardens: a single body of wardens

Since 1947, the Gran Paradiso National Park has had its own park wardens for the surveillance and patrolling of the protected area. Unlike more recently established national parks, for which the framework law assigns surveillance to state forest wardens (Corpo Forestale dello Stato, and now the Carabinieri Forestali), the Gran Paradiso park has retained its own historic warden corps, perpetuating a tradition and consolidating a wealth of experience over time. It is above all thanks to the wardens that the Alpine Ibex has been saved from extinction, and there are now 3,000 Ibex on the territory of the Park. The wardens have a very thorough knowledge of the protected area and the Park's animals and territory and they provide a service that is truly unique, keeping a watch from dawn to dusk.

NB: The Italian national park forest wardens corps was transferred not long ago to the Carabinieri who are responsible for park surveillance work. Exceptionally, the Gran Paradiso Park has been allowed to retain its own warden corps.

The park management bodies are located in various places, in and outside the Park:

President, Director and Secretariat

Turin

Note: the law states that the Park's head office must be located in Turin. This arrangement, leaving the head office highly decentralised and far from the park is not satisfactory in many respects. Steps have been taken to explore the possibility of moving it to a more strategic location such as Ivrea.

Secretariat for tourism in the central area:

Turin

Secretariat for tourism for the two sides of the massif:**Piedmont:** *Noasca Visitors Centre***Aosta Valley:** Gran Paradis Foundation**Administration** in Aosta**Botanical office:**

Jardin Paradisia alpine botanical gardens

Cogne (Aosta)

The Park wardens department can be contacted in the following places:

- Orco Valley, Noasca, Jamonin hamlet
- Soana Valley, Ronco Canavese
- Cogne Valley, Cogne, GPNP Pavilion
- Valsavarenche, Dégioz hamlet
- Réma Valley, Noutra Dama de Réma, Bruil hamlet

Park Plan (= Management Plan)

www.pngp.it/vivere-nel-parco/piano-del-parco

Italian Law 394/1991 provides for a park plan serving as a tool to protect the natural and environmental values entrusted to the Park Authority. The Plan divides up the territory on the basis of differing levels of protection; it is drawn up by the Park office after mandatory consultations with and opinion of the **Park Community** and it is approved by the Piedmont and Aosta Valley regions and then by the Ministry.

The Park Plan, which was a requirement attached to the diploma's renewal in 2012 (cf. section 6), was finally approved by the two regions in 2019 (Aosta Valley Council resolution no. 349 of 22 March 2019 and Piedmont Region resolution no. 32-8597 of 22 March 2019), as well as by the Ministry. In principle, it is now fully operational; that said, the Management regulations are still lacking, notably where zones C and D are concerned.

The plan comprises maps with different protection regimes. Its contents must be made known to the local communities; the largest obstacle to acceptance is the fact that grazing is not permitted in zone A. Discussions are still under way concerning the boundaries of zone D, particularly as regards Valsavarenche.

Zone Piano del Parco		
Zona A1 - Sistema d'alta montagna	8757,5	12,3%
Zona A2 - Sistema delle aree naturali	25674,3	36,1%
Zona B1 - Riserva generale orientata	28646,1	40,3%
Zona B2 - Riserva generale orientata al pascolo	6121,3	8,6%
Zona C - Agricola di protezione	1707,2	2,4%
Zona D - Promozione economica e sociale	71,8	0,10%
Zona D1 - Aggregati storici	66,4	0,09%
Totale complessivo	71044,7	100%

Zone A: strictly protected– no human activity

The fully protected area is subdivided into zones A1 (summits, rock formations, areas with snow cover, moraines) and A2 (alpine grasslands, wetlands).

Aim: conservation and development of habitats and ecosystems. The only activities authorised are the study and observation of nature, day-trips, mountaineering and backcountry skiing and scientific research. No construction.

Zone B: Heavily protected zone, open to human activities (agriculture, livestock breeding). No new roads, no changing of land to wetlands.

B1: Protective woodland, areas little used by agriculture. New structures (renovations) useful for protection and agriculture are authorised solely for existing buildings, with very limited scope for conversion work.

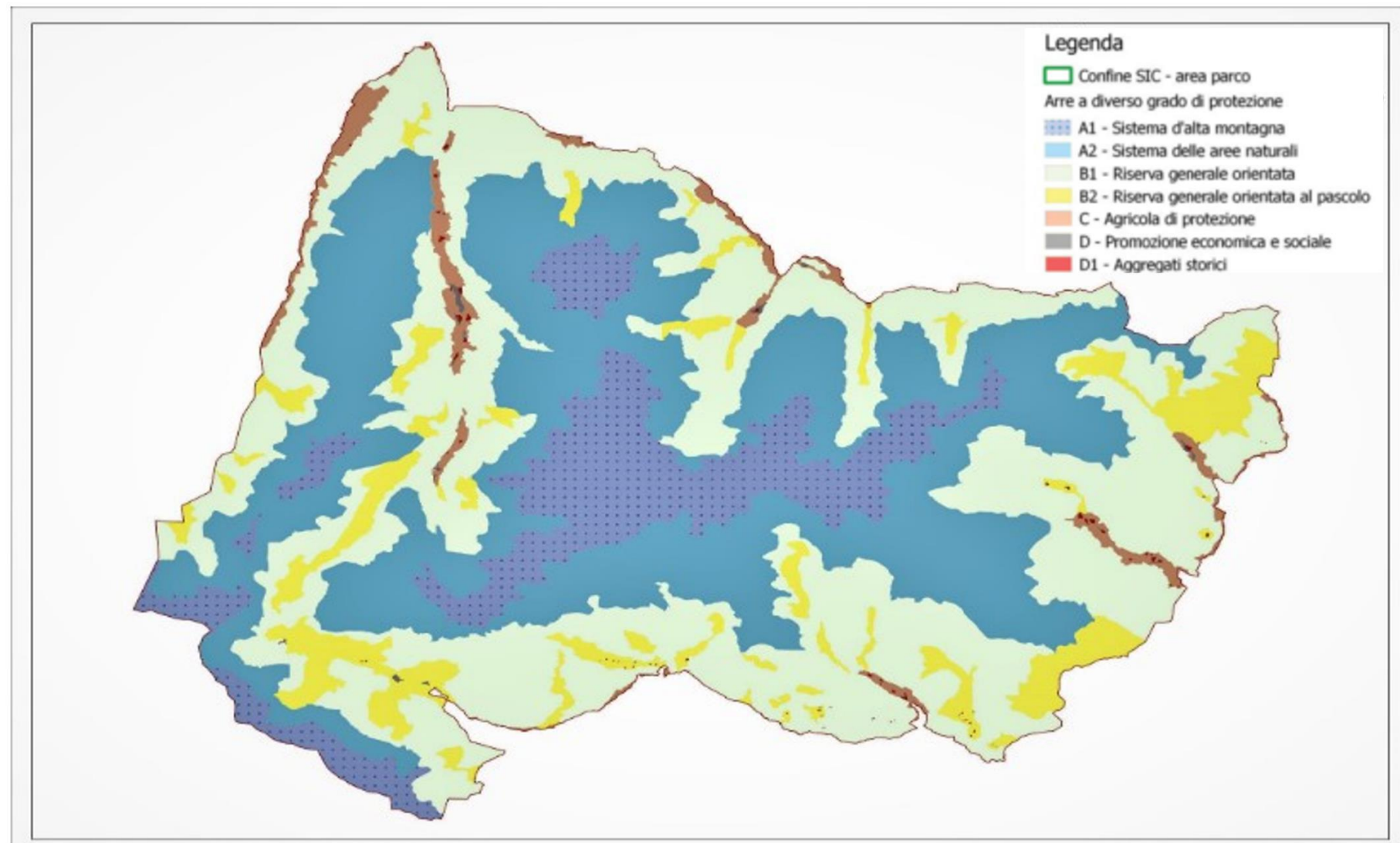
B2: Conversion work is allowed for agricultural purposes as long as it does not interfere with the landscape and the environment. Existing buildings may be used as shepherd huts and refuges.

Zone C: (valley floors): farming and craft activities. Natural values linked with traditional activities. Uses and activities allowing nature- and landscape-friendly farming and food production. Installations for the development of tourism, sports, educational and cultural activities not requiring facilities that would be incompatible with landscape protection are also allowed.

Zone D: promotion of economic and social aspects. Villages, urbanised areas. Intended for the development of activities and services that contribute to the promotion of the Park and to the economic and social development of local communities.

D1: historic ensembles. Work to restore existing structures is permitted.

A detailed description of the different zones and the list of permitted and prohibited activities are set out in the document entitled *Piano Direttore - NORME TECNICHE DI ATTUAZIONE*



Gran Paradiso Quality Label



What is the Gran Paradiso Quality Label?

The Gran Paradiso National Park issues the Quality Label to operators in the craft, tourism, hospitality and food and farming sectors. The National Park has created this single identifying label to encourage the joint promotion of activities of different entrepreneurs who, in their day-to-day work, share not only a place of origin but also a common environmental and cultural vocation in offering high-quality products while respecting the environment and local traditions.

Framework law no. 394/91 on nature reserves states that the Park may grant use of its emblem to local services and products meeting the level of quality required by the Park itself. Accordingly, the Gran Paradiso National Park has created its own Quality Label in order to:

- develop common, controlled quality criteria for all producers and service providers;
- improve the quality of the environment and place emphasis on sustainable development, through the stimulation of production techniques that are compatible with the protected area;
- develop uniform communication to give the area's products a high profile;
- give consumers a guarantee of products of certified origin and reduced environmental impact.

Who can be awarded the Gran Paradiso Quality Label?

The label can be awarded to all local producers and companies with the qualities required in three different sectors: **food and farming**, **crafts** and **tourism/hospitality**. The companies must operate within the reserve (the Park zone*) or the adjacent areas (the Grand Paradiso zone **).

The products and services which have been awarded the Gran Paradiso Quality Label offer numerous plus-points for consumers, notably a **guarantee of control and quality**. Food products (cheeses, jams, honey etc), local craft products (in wood, copper or bronze) and also tourism and hospitality services are of **guaranteed origin and quality**, thanks to the procedures and rules followed by the operators. Consequently, consumers or end users can be assured that they are buying a **high level of purity, local character or service**.

4. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

It should be remembered that Gran Paradiso has been twinned with the Vanoise since 1972 and that the renewal of their respective European Diplomas has been synchronised since 2006. The diplomas were jointly renewed in a 2011 resolution (**Resolution CM/ResDip(2011)3**). Notable milestones in cooperation between the Vanoise and the Gran Paradiso have been:

- 08/07/1972: official twinning in Noutra Dama de Réma, Aosta Valley
- 1999: signature of a "neighbourhood charter" aimed at bringing together the people, institutions and management techniques on both sides and promoting high-quality tourism
- a convention (appended) in existence since 2013, setting out *inter alia* the following objectives in the form of undertakings:

The Vanoise and Gran Paradiso national parks:

- ✓ affirm their ambition to constitute an area of preserved nature that is exemplary in Europe,
- ✓ affirm their shared commitment to the principles of a policy protecting landscapes, habitats, biotopes and species in conformity with international law,
- ✓ affirm their desire to share with the local authorities of their respective territories their ambition to protect and promote the "Vanoise – Gran Paradiso" alpine ensemble at the heart of the network of European nature parks,
- ✓ affirm in particular their determination to develop exchanges between their partners, local authorities, socio-professional groups and administrations, with a view to fostering the emergence of joint projects in the social, economic and cultural spheres contributing to the sustainable development of their territories,
- ✓ affirm their desire to jointly manage the European Diploma of protected areas as they have been invited to do by the Council of Europe and agree, to that end, to work together to develop a programme meeting the following three main objectives:
 - bringing together people and institutions,
 - fostering convergence of management techniques,
 - promoting high-quality nature tourism.

Following a recommendation made in 2012, it was attempted to produce a joint report for the two parks for the year 2018 but it emerged that the concerns and management aspects regarded as priorities for one park were not for the other; that much was also clear from the different recommendations put forward by the experts. Finally, there were also administrative problems in synchronising the reports. Keeping the reports separate seemed to be a more effective approach while recommending that one section covering transfrontier cooperation be drafted jointly and appear in both reports.

Potential areas for cooperation between the Vanoise and the Gran Paradiso

There were some very interesting exchanges on numerous topics at the joint meeting of the two parks in Modane on 16 September 2021 and a strong desire expressed to reactivate cooperation, with the following topics showing the greatest potential:

- a joint meeting of the scientific advisers each year, with one side inviting the other
- scientific validation of joint projects and studies; ensuring common methodology. To take one example, differing methods are used to count Alpine Ibex at present; would it be possible to coordinate the timing and reconcile the findings?
- taking advantage of the appointment of new scientific managers for the two parks to resume deployment of common techniques

- continuing the "grand count exercises" on both sides, which previously provided opportunities to meet up and exchange, one possibility being to mark the anniversaries of the parks
- Ptarmigan: if possible, a single common method (auditory survey?), with swapping of findings
- Biodiversity transects, which could be complementary
- More exchanges on grazing area use: there is now less pastureland in Piedmont (invasion by trees and bushes) but higher demand in France.

5. SPECIFIC POINTS CONCERNING MANAGEMENT DISCUSSED DURING THE VISIT

A number of specific points were discussed in-depth during the two days in Orco valley and at the meeting of the authorities of the two parks in Modane. Interestingly, nearly all of them are relevant to both parks, even though the issues and the local context are sometimes different. It is quite clear that more dialogue on these points could be a source of mutual enrichment, even though differing local solutions are often required.

5.1 Grazing and predator management

A sizeable part of the park is given over to cattle and sheeprearing. However, there is a manifest and substantial decline in these activities, seen especially at subalpine level with scrub growth, the return of woodland and the abandoning of many buildings (stables, huts used by shepherds or herders etc). Life is difficult in villages, and there are few young people who are willing to go into pastoral work.

In contrast to the Vanoise, the Gran Paradiso has only a small wolf population (4 packs, around 20 individuals). But problems might well arise in the near future! On the other hand, boar have caused major damage, right up to the alpine level.

The park has instituted biodiversity monitoring using transects at different altitudes. This work is closely linked with grazing. Attempts have been made to recover pastureland with donkeys and the monitoring of fauna, particularly invertebrates, has been introduced.

5.2 Management of the park

The management has undergone numerous changes in recent years, but the Park continues to operate without major problems. A new director and a new head of research are currently being appointed.

There are some problems arising from Italian law. It is stipulated that the head office shall be in Turin, far from the park, and it is not possible to have a deputy director (only one director post is allowed). Furthermore, the law does not provide for a scientific committee; that said, the management has set up a small group of researchers who are active in the Park, which fulfils the role of such a committee.

More worrying, though, is the failure to recruit new wardens to replace those who leave the Park or retire. The Italian authorities will not allow these vacancies to be filled, despite the funding being available! This poses serious problems for the carrying out of all the tasks involving surveillance and monitoring (such as counting mammals and birds). The warden staff has fallen from 60 in 1981 to 42 at present! That said, the Park has the advantage of having its own corps of wardens, unlike most of Italy's national parks, where surveillance is carried out by the Carabinieri forestali.

The Park manages 38 high-altitude huts, and maintaining them poses a few problems.

5.3 Public access – infrastructures

The Park is freely accessible, including where zone A is concerned. However, access is restricted to certain wintering sites (Ptarmigan for example). There were very high numbers of local tourists in 2020 (lockdown in the Piedmont region), and this was probably also the case in 2021. However, there is no systematic counting system (for the footpaths).

One major problem is the increase in traffic on the roads providing access to the upper reaches of the Park. Temporary traffic bans (at weekends), with organised shuttles, have been tested on the road leading up to the

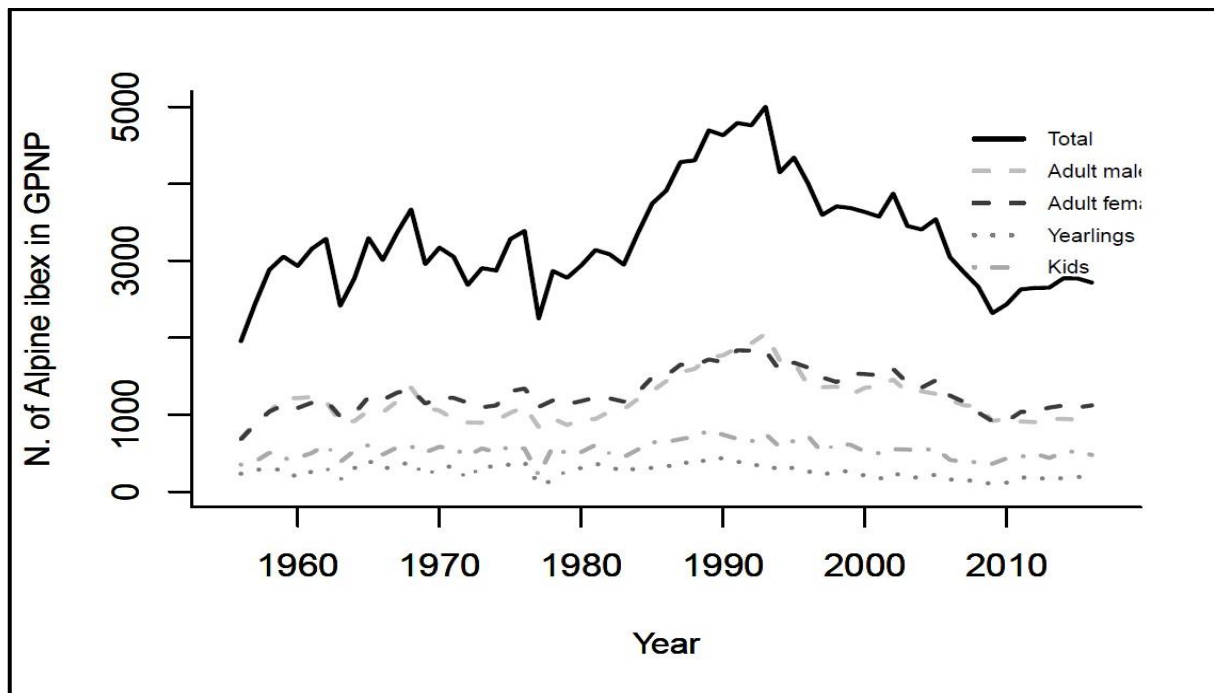
Nivolet pass. The introduction of paying car parking has been considered. The mayor of Ceresole agrees with the principle of regulating/limiting traffic.

A close eye must also be kept on the increase in certain sports activities such as mountain biking, especially since electric models are now on the market.

There is a series of old hydroelectric installations dotted across the Park. The possibility of a major new scheme on the Aosta side has been discussed, but is on stand-by. An application to generate hydroelectric power in a watercourse at the park's boundary is under consideration. The Park must remain vigilant.

5.4 Research – monitoring

These two topics are closely linked, with much research work involving the counting of mammals. Obviously, the Alpine Ibex is the emblematic species that has been the focus of a great deal of research efforts, in collaboration with other parks in the alpine arc.



Ibex populations have regularly increased, even to the point where individuals have been exchanged with other parks (genetic diversity). However, they have declined in recent years, the most likely explanation being the change in the period of vegetation growth (because of climate change), which is no longer synchronised with the growth of young Ibex. It is thought that their mothers have difficulty in finding enough food and later on in the season, when the demand from the young is at its highest. Research is currently being carried out to confirm or disprove this theory.

Monitoring on a long-term basis has made it possible to estimate life expectancy as follows: Alpine Ibex - 25 years, Chamois - 30 years and Marmots - 15 years. However, little is available in the way of data on trends in Marmot populations. There are 22 pairs of eagles in the Park, and three bearded vulture nesting sites. There is regular cooperation with the universities of Turin (small mammals), Sardinia (Ibex), Zurich (ecology and genetics), Quebec (Marmots), Milan (snow and birds) and Chester (GB – dynamics of Ibex populations).

Also noteworthy is the longstanding exchange of data with the Vanoise Park. However, certain changes in methodology in France have made it difficult to aggregate data! The Gran Paradiso wishes to maintain occasional "grand counts", carried out identically on either side of the border, which are also social events that unite the two parks.



The list above shows the most important ongoing research projects; an exhaustive list providing more detail is appended.

Alpine ibex

- 1) Life-History, parasites and dynamics over time in relation to environmental variations;
- 2) Effects of genetic variability on Life History;
- 3) Social networks, interactions and individual variations in behavior (personality);
- 4) Reproductive success by genetic methods;
- 5) European distribution of the species;
- 6) Effects of genetic variability on resistance to pathogens;
- 7) Male social hierarchy and reproductive behavior;
- 8) Spatial behavior and resource selection;
- 9) Population dynamics and measurement of intrinsic and extrinsic effects on the population density.

Alpine Marmot

- 1) Demographic parameters of the population in relation to available resources.
- 2) Environmental indices of presence and absence of the species.
- 3) Characterization of the quality and quantity of plant species in the different territories.

Alpine Chamois

- 1) Space use;
- 2) Spatial and reproductive behavior of males;
- 3) Effects of snow and climate changes on reproductive success.

Animal biodiversity

- 1) Analysis of α - and β -diversity along altitudinal gradients;
- 2) Application of climate / environmental change scenarios to biodiversity;
- 3) Identification of species and habitats most vulnerable to changes;
- 4) Identification of biodiversity indicators.

Grey wolf

- 1) Analysis of presence, distribution and density;
- 2) Effects of the wolf on presence, distribution and density of preyed species.

6. IMPLEMENTATION OF CONDITIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ATTACHED TO THE DIPLOMA RENEWAL IN 2012

The bulk of the information comes from the National Park's 2019 annual report to the secretariat and has been supplemented by data provided during the on-the-spot discussions; a number of the points have also been discussed in more detail in the previous sections.

Condition

1. *the park management plan must be formally approved before the end of 2012.*

Management plan: The management plan of the Gran Paradiso National Park (GPNP) was finally approved by the two regions (Council resolution n. 349, on 22 march 2019 of the Regione Autonoma Valle d'Aosta, and resolution n. 32-8597, on 22 march 2019 of the Regione Piemonte).

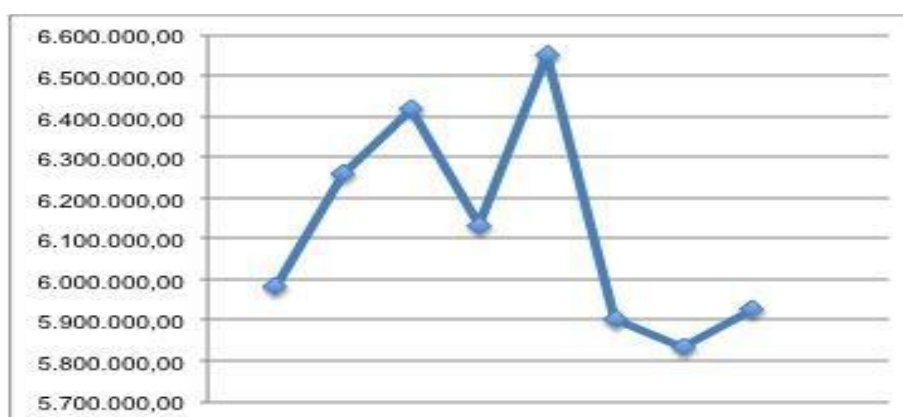
The management plan of the park is therefore finally and fully operational. However, the Regolamento di gestione still needs to be adopted.

The management plan contains the maps that represent the different areas subject to different protection constraints: these areas are now fully operational. The contents of the Plan and the relative maps will be presented to local people in the coming months. The most relevant topics to be explained will be those relating to the maximum protection areas (Areas "A"), in which even the grazing (by domestic herbivores) activities will not be permitted.

Recommendations

1. *ensure that funding is chiefly provided by the state, the regions and the provinces, and that it is properly integrated with other resources;*

In the last 8 years the GPNP received ordinary contributions from the Italian State ranging from € 5.834.794,65 (in 2017) to € 6.552.395,87 (in 2015) (Fig. 1).



Other funding is supplied for specific projects from the Valle d'Aosta Region and Piedmont Region. The European Commission financed some projects with Interreg-Alcotra and Life-Nature funding. The ratio between total income (ordinary contribution and European fundings) and expenditure is shown in the following table. The personnel costs amount between the 38 to 48% of total expenditures.

2018

Year	Incomes	Total expenditures	Personnel expenditures
2016	€ 7.980.256	€ 7.973.953 €	€ 3.605.652
2017	€ 9.450.911	€ 9.432.484	€ 3.605.652
2018	€ 7.756.993	€ 7.676.284	€ 3.595.045

The resources available to the Park are sufficient to cover management costs and therefore to maintain a high conservation level of the GPNP. However, active conservation actions and important works for restoring the integrity of some habitats cannot be financed with these funds. An important part of funding is allocated to local community development actions.

2. *provide the national park with adequate staff at executive level to enable the director to deal with essential tasks, especially strategic issues;*

The GPNP's staff reached, in the past, 88 units; nowadays the staff is made up of 77 units.

The division between the different functions and tasks is as follows:

1 director; 51 rangers (out of 60 indicated in the planned staffing); 6 employees in the technical and planning sector (4 architects, 1 surveyor and 1 worker);

Scientific and veterinary/botanical sector: 1 veterinarian, 1 biologist, 1 botanist out of 4;

General affairs: 10 office workers; Administrative sector: 7 office workers;

12 other people are employed in the GPNP Visitor Centers (temporary workers. not part of the Park staff).

The current organic structure, which for a long time allowed to reach the Park's conservation objectives, will have to be slightly modified in the future, to allow the director and top management to devote more time to the elaboration of suitable conservation plans and projects.

3. *actively defend the inclusion of measures to safeguard natural and landscape assets in town planning proposals and decisions;*

The GPNP is located on the territory of 13 municipalities. Of these, only one is completely inside the Park (Valsavarenche). The others are included in the Park area for a lesser extent of territory (minimum: Villeneuve, 7,9%), generally concerning the most mountainous parts. The urban development tends to concentrate at the bottom of the valleys, around the historical settlements. This is the reason why most of infrastructural intervention are very limited.

Many municipalities have specific implementation regulations for the interventions in the historical center. With the approval of the GPMP, the relationship between the management choices of the municipalities and those of the protected area will be even clearer. This is mainly because the rules of the Park plan were included in local urban planning, as required by the Italian Law on Protected Areas.

The structures for tourism are generally concentrated in the inhabited centres; some huts and a road at a high altitude involve tourist flow concentrations in summer months that locally create conservation problems. Since 2003 the Park regulated and limited the traffic on this road.

4. *integrate the value of forests as ecosystems in the development of forest management plans;*

The Park territory is covered for about 22% by woods, including bushes and pioneer invasion woods – cf. chapter on grazing above. The lands were not managed for decades.

Regarding the wood management, in the Park there are some public-owned forests for which planning tools were drawn up, mainly in the north side of the Park (Aosta Valley).

The GPNP identifies, as a management objective, the naturalistic forestry aimed at the conservation of forest habitats. The Park Plan also includes the Management Plan of the SIC (IT1201000) which provides conservation measures for all forest habitats and specific measures for forest habitats of Directive 92/43 - EEC. Finally, it should be underlined that, in the GPNP, relevant forest areas for conservation were identified: in these areas any management activity is totally excluded, to allow the natural evolution of the forest.

In the GPNP were also included some areas (one per valley) defined as “Ancient Woods”, according to the guidelines of the Italian Ministry (published in 2007). These areas respond to very specific characteristics: they must contain plants of considerable size, with standing and ground wood and lack any management action for the last 60 years. In these areas any human intervention is prohibited.

5. continue to encourage farming activities that are compatible and synergise with biodiversity preservation;

In the last 20 years, farming activities progressively reduced. Currently inside the GPNP there are very few professional breeders, mostly devoted to cattle breeding, for the production of milk (typical local cheese) and meat; most farms are managed part-time. Although the percentage of people employed in agriculture is very low (3.5%), the impact of domestic grazing is far from irrelevant: this is due to the fact that on the alpine pastures of the Park the transhumance of the herds and flocks is important, mainly during the 4 summer months. However, monitoring of the pasture areas (time, location, animal charge, etc.) is missing. Also the impact of the EU subsidies on grazing demand should be evaluated.

For some years the Park has been carrying out research on the impact of domestic grazing on animal biodiversity (Ministerial Project) that will be fundamental for the management of these activities in all the territories that belong to the Park or that the park rents in order to preserve biological diversity. The monitoring project on animal biodiversity, started in 2006, was shared with 4 other mountain national parks: this survey network will allow to increase useful data for the management of high mountain open areas. Apart from domestic grazing, agricultural activities are almost absent in the Park.

6. avoid all new projects for the catchment of water resources for electricity generation, apart from mini-hydroplants duly authorised by the national park;

The territory of the Park (mainly the southern side) is characterised by the presence of important water collection infrastructures (dams and complex and multiple collection sites) for the purpose of energetic production. These are infrastructures that were designed and built over 70 years ago. These dams, and the relative power lines, have obviously impacts on the environment. The territory of the Park is also characterised by hydrogeological upheavals that mainly affects the torrential parts of the bottom of the valleys: these events are due to the geological characteristics of this area. In some districts, the dams, built so many years ago, represent a form of mitigation of the effects of such extreme events. These mitigation effects are mainly connected with the conservation of the fish fauna which, in the southern slope of the GPNP, is present with better distributed and more abundant populations. Among these populations are also included the populations of marble trout *Salmo marmoratus* recently found in a secondary stream, a tributary of the Orco creek (Noasca, Piedmont). To minimize the consequences of water withdrawals, a careful monitoring is carried out by the Park and any other new project of dam building is banned by the Park. After the approval of the Park Management Plan, only the small water withdrawals, only for local energetic purpose, can be authorised. A limited project is currently under examination (cf specific chapter above).

7. establish a scientific advisory council or other mechanism to provide input from the scientific community regarding the management of the park.

The National Law on Parks (Law n. 394/1991) does not provide and does not allow the establishment of a scientific advising commission. Nonetheless, the GPNP has, for many years, established scientific relations with Italian and foreign universities, in order to implement research projects useful for guiding the conservation of the protected area. In 2019, with the nomination of a new director, a selection was made to identify some university researchers who were able - and available - to participate in a scientific commission. This commission will not be able to express binding opinions on the choices made by the council, but it will aim to

address specific species and habitat research and monitoring topics, in order to obtain useful results for conservation. This commission should be implemented for the year 2020. Some members of this commission will participate in the Scientific Commission of the Vanoise National Park meetings, to create joint research projects and therefore to manage the two neighboring protected areas.

This “informal” network is now established and will be operational once the director is formally appointed.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As a conclusion to the short mission carried out, it can confidently be stated that the European value of the Gran Paradiso National Park is confirmed and the appropriate management of the Park is a guarantee of the conservation of the natural and landscape assets present. The period of nearly 10 years it has taken to finalise the management plan does not appear to have had any ramifications of note. The only potential hindrance to activities comes from the staffing situation (failure to fill vacancies) and frequent changes in the management team.

Transfrontier cooperation with the Vanoise Park has declined somewhat but there is a real desire from both parks to give it fresh impetus.

Consequently, we recommend that the European Diploma for the Gran Paradiso National Park be renewed for a further 10-year period, with the following recommendations attached:

1. to finalise the rules governing the application of the Management Plan in 2022 and to implement the Plan.
2. to closely monitor the schemes to renovate or build new hydroelectric installations, preserve the natural water courses and reduce the impact of power lines.
3. to study, with the municipalities concerned, solutions for reducing tourist traffic on the roads providing access to the upper reaches of the Park.
4. to closely monitor the management of grazing land in close coordination with the other competent bodies (municipality etc); to establish mapping and a database for the medium-and long-term monitoring of pastureland use and livestock grazing densities.
5. to stop the erosion of staff (wardens) and, if possible, fill the vacant posts; to continue to explore possibilities for bringing the head office of the Park's management closer to the area concerned.
6. to continue research into biodiversity relating in particular to the abandonment of pastureland on the high-altitude and subalpine levels. To group scientific research findings in a database that is accessible to researchers and managers.
7. to carry on counting alpine ungulates and birds in collaboration with the Vanoise Park, using the same methodology if possible.
8. to put the Park's scientific committee on a formal footing, within the possibilities of the law, and make it operational.
9. to ensure that the National Park's research programme and activities take account of the effects of climate change on the ecological processes linked to the long-term conservation of the diploma-holding area's European interest. Research efforts should be coordinated with those of the Vanoise and the findings incorporated in the respective management plans.
10. to publicise the European Diploma, make wider use of its logo and promote dialogue between the diploma-holding parks. In particular, to pursue and step up transfrontier cooperation with the adjacent

Vanoise National Park. To take advantage of the forthcoming anniversaries (100 years of the Gran Paradiso in 2022, 60 years of the Vanoise in 2023) to publicise the achievements of that cooperation.

Appendices

- List of research projects
- Gran Paradiso - Vanoise cooperation agreement

Appendix 1: List of research projects

RICERCHE IN ATTO - Anno 2018													
TIPO	SPECIE/HABITAT	TEMA	DURATA	IPOTESI Scopi	RICERCATORE	UNIVERSITA'	Referente	TIPO DI CONTRATT	COSTI ANNUALI	FONTE FINANZIAMENTO	STATO DELLE RICERCHE	N. PUBBLICAZIONI	Internazionali
Ricerca interna	Stambecco	Eco-etologia	Pluriennale	1) Life-History, parassiti e dinamica nel tempo in relazione a variazioni ambientali; 2) Effetti della variabilità genetica sulla Life History; 3) Reti sociali, interazioni e variazioni individuali nel comportamento (personalità); 4) Successo riproduttivo mediante metodi genetici; 5) Distribuzione europea della specie;	Alice Brambilla	Uni_Zurigo	Bassano	Borsa post doc a tempo parziale Università di Zurigo (30%)		Interreg Lemed-ibex	In corso	4	4
Ricerca interna	Stambecco	Eco-patologia e genetica	Triennale	Effetti della variabilità genetica sulla resistenza ai patogeni	Alice Brambilla	Uni_Zurigo	Bassano; Lukas Keller	Borsa post doc a tempo parziale		Interreg Lemed-ibex	In corso	1	1
Ricerca interna	Stambecco	Ecologia comportamentale	Pluriennale	1) Gerarchia sociale maschile e comportamento riproduttivo; 2) Ritmi di attività; 3) Comportamento spaziale e selezione delle risorse; 4) Stress ossidativo	Stefano Grignolio e Francesca Brivio	Uni_Sassari	Apollonio Marco	Contratto col Dipartimento		Ordinari	Da rinnovare	10	10
Ricerca interna	Stambecco	Dinamica di popolazione ed ecologia	Pluriennale	1) Analisi delle cause che condizionano la dinamica di popolazione di Stambecco; 2) Misurazione degli effetti intrinseci e intrinseci alla popolazione	Achaz graf von Hardenberg	Uni_Chester	Bassano	Convenzione	0		In corso	2	2
Ricerca interna	Marmotta	Ecologia; etologia	Pluriennale	1) Parametri demografici della popolazione in relazione alle risorse disponibili. 2) Indici ambientali di presenza e assenza della specie. 3) Caratterizzazione della qualità e quantità delle specie vegetali nei diversi territori	Caterina Ferrari	Uni_Torino	Bertolino/Rolando	Borsa di Dottorato	14000	Interni (5x1000)	In corso		
Ricerca interna	Marmotta	Etologia	Pluriennale	1) Personalità individuale e life history	Caterina Ferrari	Uni_Chester/Uni_UQAM	Hardenberg/Réale				In corso	2	2
Ricerca interna	Marmotta	Parassitofauna	Pluriennale	1) Parassitofauna in zone differenti. 2) Emoparassiti.	Caterina Ferrari/Stefania Zante	Uni_Torino	Bassano/Ferroglio				1) In corso. 2) In progettazione	1	1
Ricerca interna	Camoscio	Ecologia; etologia	Pluriennale	1) Uso dello spazio di femmine; 2) Comportamento spaziale e riproduttivo dei maschi; 3) Effetti della neve sulla paternità;	1. Antonella Cotza e 2. Emanuel Rocchia	Uni_Siena e PNGP	Lovari_Ferrari; Bassano	1. Borsa di Dottorato e 2. Borsa di studio PNGP		Uni_Siena e interni	Da rinnovare		
Ricerca interna	Biodiversità animale	Presenza, densità e distribuzione lungo gradienti altitudinali; effetti del clima	Pluriennale (2 anni di monitoraggio), periodica con ripetizioni ogni quattro anni - Alcuni monitoraggi con cadenza annuale	1. Analisi α - e β -diversità lungo gradienti altitudinali; 2. Applicazione di scenari di cambiamento climatico/ambientale alla biodiversità; 3. Individuazione di specie e habitat maggiormente vulnerabili ai cambiamenti; 4. Individuazione di indicatori di biodiversità	1. Cristiana Cerrato; 2. Emanuel Rocchia; 3. Cristina Tha	PNGP	Ramona Viterbi	Borse	30000	Fondi Biodiversità Ministeriali - Progetti Europei (PITEM)	in corso	5	5

Ricerca interna	Biodiversità animale	Citizen Science	Pluriennale	1. Coinvolgimento del pubblico nel monitoraggio di specie animali; 2. Sensibilizzazione alle tematiche di conservazione e ricerca	1. Giulia Marangoni; 2. Cristiana Cerrato	PNGP	Ramona Viterbi	Borse	10000	Fondi Biodiversità Ministeriali	In corso		
Ricerca interna	Ecologia del paesaggio	Trasformazione di habitat e paesaggio	Pluriennale	1. Ricostruzione dei cambiamenti di copertura e uso del suolo nel tempo, a diverse scale spaziali; 2. Sviluppo di metodologie semplificate per monitorare i cambiamenti degli habitat; 3. Applicazione delle mappe di cambiamento ottenute ai dati faunistici	1. Michele Zurlo; 2. Cristiana Cerrato	PNGP, Università Milano Statale (Marco Caccianiga, PhD Michele Zurlo)	Bruno Bassano, Laura Poggio, Ramona Viterbi	Borse	12000	Fondi Biodiversità Ministeriali	In corso	1	1
Ricerca esterna	Praterie zone umide	Remote sensing, Earth Critical Zone	Pluriennale	1. Utilizzo dei dati satellitari per la conservazione e la gestione delle aree protette; 2. Osservatori di cambiamento globale	Antonello Provenzale et al.	CNR e altri	Viterbi	vari	0 (coinvolgimento personale interno e borsisti PNGP)	Progetti europei (Horizon 2020; PITEM)	in corso	2	2
Ricerca interna	Trota marmorata	Reintroduzione e conservazione ex-situ: azione Post-Life_Bioaquae	Annuale	Riaffermazione di popolamenti autoctoni riproduttivi di T.marmorata	Rocco Iacobuzio	PNGP	Bassano	Borsista	15000	Fondi Biodiversità Ministeriali	in corso		
Ricerca interna	Laghi alpini	Azioni Post-Life_Bioaquae	Annuale	Monitoraggi post-eradicazione ed evoluzione ecologica dei laghi alpini	Rocco Tiberti	Uni_Pavia	Bassano	Borsista	da definire	da definire	In corso	5	4
Ricerca interna	Praterie e pascoli	Pascoli ed effetti climatici, effetti del pascolo sulla biodiversità animale, indirizzi di gestione	Triennale	Mitigazione degli effetti del clima e del pascolamento	Vari	PNGP e Uni_Firenze	Poggio e Viterbi	Vari		Progetto LIFE-PASTORALP	In corso		
Ricerca esterna	Piccoli mammiferi e Moscardino	Ecologia e presenza_distribuzione e	Annuale		Sandro Bertolino	Uni_Torino	Bertolino (Rolando)	Incarico di ricerca al Dipartimento		Fondi Biodiversità Ministeriali	In corso		
Ricerca esterna	Lupo	Presenza e distribuzione	Annuale	1) Presenza, distribuzione e stima di densità; 2) Effetti sulle prede	Elisa Avanzinelli	PNGP	Viterbi/Bassano	Incarico		Fondi Biodiversità Ministeriali			
Ricerca esterna	Arvicola delle nevi	Stima di densità, dinamica di popolazione e clima	Annuale	1) Stima di densità per cattura e ricattura; 2) Sopravvivenza e dinamica di popolazione; 3) Effetti di neve e clima	Valentina La Morgia	ISPRA	Bassano/Viterbi	Incarico					
Ricerca interna	Specie animali in Direttiva	Presenza e distribuzione specie in Direttiva	Pluriennale	1) Analisi della distribuzione con rilevamenti diretti; 2) Citizen Science; 3) Raccolta dati della Sorveglianza; 4) Formazione specifica da definire	Vari	Uni-To (Bonelli)	Viterbi	Incarichi		Fondi Biodiversità Ministeriali	In corso	0	0
Ricerca esterna	Habitat praterie e foresta	Analisi dei servizi ecosistemici	Pluriennale		Claudia Canedoli (Dottorato)	Uni_Mi (Padoa-Schioppa)	Viterbi	Convenzione e	0		Iniziato	0	0
Ricerca esterna	Avifauna di prateria	Analisi su ecologia e densità di Spioncello e Culbianco in relazione ai cambiamenti climatici	Pluriennale	1) Analisi della variazione delle densità lungo transetti; 2) Successo riproduttivo; 3) Variazioni dell'ecologia in base alla copertura nevosa.	Prof. Saino	Uni_Milano	Bassano	Convenzione e di ricerca	6000	Fondi Biodiversità Ministeriali	In corso	0	0

Appendix 2: Partnership

translation of the partnership between the two National Parks - http://www.pnnp.it/sites/default/files/convenzione_partenariato_pnv.pdf

Partnership agreement between the Vanoise and Gran Paradiso National Parks

Preamble

- Considering the geographical, historical, natural and human links that unite the Vanoise and Gran Paradiso massifs,
- Considering the international dimension taken on by the Vanoise and Gran Paradiso national parks, notably their major contribution to the preservation of the Alpine Ibex,
- Considering that the two parks, twinned since 8 July 1972, are resolutely focusing their action on sustainable development and long-term protection and that the area concerned forms one of the most extensive protected areas in the western Alps,
- Considering the shared objective of ultimately creating one vast European Park,
- Considering that the joint renewal of the European Diploma awarded to the two parks was granted by the Committee of Ministers of Council of Europe on 6 July 2011,

Undertakings

The Vanoise and Gran Paradiso national parks

- affirm their ambition to constitute an area of preserved nature that is exemplary in Europe,
- affirm their shared commitment to the principles of a policy of protecting landscape, habitats, biotopes and species in keeping with international law,
- affirm their desire to share with the local authorities of their respective territories their ambition to protect and promote the "Vanoise – Gran Paradiso" alpine at the heart of the network of European nature parks,
- affirm in particular their determination to develop exchanges between their partners, local authorities, socio-professional groups and administrations, with a view to fostering the emergence of joint projects in the social, economic and cultural spheres contributing to the sustainable development of their territories,
- affirm their desire to jointly manage the European Diploma of protected areas as they have been invited to do by the Council of Europe

and agree, to that end, to work together to develop a programme geared to meeting the following three main objectives:

- bringing together people and institutions,
- fostering convergence of management techniques,
- promoting high-quality nature tourism.

1. Bringing together people and institutions

The four strategies working towards this objective have been identified as follows:

1.1.- Closer ties between the management bodies of the parks through reciprocal participation in meetings of institutional bodies (governing board, economic, social and cultural panels, scientific council) and technical bodies (thematic working groups etc), particularly where common issues are concerned, including regulations, scientific monitoring, information and educational activity.

Ultimately, the administrators of each park could, once the necessary amendments have been made to national legislations, participate in voting by the other park's governing board on matters of common interest.

Every year, the governing boards shall vote on a provisional programme of joint actions, and their activity reports shall include an assessment of those actions.

1.2.- The two parks shall encourage mobility of their staff, project managers and field staff, under arrangements agreed jointly by the directors.

1.3.- The two parks shall foster exchanges between the schools located on their territory and devise common educational tools. In addition to the educational and linguistic aspects, these exchanges will provide an opportunity to directly involve children from local communities in the work of the parks and promote the idea of action on a European scale. The parks agree to devote significant human, technical and financial resources to developing that action each year.

1.4.- The parks shall take initiatives aimed at the local authorities and socio-professional groups to encourage twinning, study visits and exchanges of experience.

Encounters between elected representatives and business entities within the spheres of influence of the two parks (particularly those active in the spheres of tourism and agriculture) shall be encouraged, with a view to identifying themes for cooperation and joint development projects that are in the interest of local communities and compatible with environmental protection.

2. Fostering convergence of management techniques

The preservation of the natural environment is the largest common denominator of the two parks. The conservation of exemplary natural habitats and their management require expertise, methods and technologies developed as part of a network.

Within their respective area of influence, the two parks shall support a sustainable approach and, in particular, take useful initiatives to provide support for agriculture and livestock grazing geared to practices that are compatible with the preservation of sensitive natural environments.

The two parks have decided to implement the following two strategies in particular to attain this objective:

2.1.- A scientific unit common to the two parks shall be set up. The scientific unit shall comprise the directors, the chair of the scientific council of the Vanoise National Park, the head of research of the Gran Paradiso National Park and, as necessary, project managers and experts in relevant spheres.

The scientific units may set priorities for research, suggest improvements to build coherency between the scientific projects of the two parks (research, application, management) and propose initiatives on matters of international interest (European or world programmes).

A joint protocol laying down a methodology for counting populations and for monitoring migration shall be proposed by the unit, which shall establish and update the list of species concerned.

2.2.- The two parks undertake to foster coordinated scientific communication, in particular:

- during reintroduction operations,
- during international seminars,
- to produce joint responses to calls for tender,
- to jointly identify needs in terms of research on a European scale.

2.3.- The two parks shall concert their efforts to prepare and transmit to the Council of Europe the joint annual report in respect of the joint renewal of the European Diploma of protected areas of 6 July 2011.

3. Promoting high-quality nature tourism

Aware of the necessity of sharing ideas on protecting and building greater public awareness of the landscape, natural and cultural heritage of the two massifs, the Vanoise and Gran Paradiso national parks agreed to improve visitor information and reception. Three strategies for attaining this objective have been identified:

3.1.- Each visitor centre and information point must be able to provide visitors with information on the features of either park.

A core of activities linked to nature tourism could be envisaged as part of the annual events programmes.

3.2.- Specific information on the regulatory aspects shall be drawn up and adapted for publication in various forms.

The two parks shall seek to harmonise their rules and consider a bilingual shared code of conduct.

The directors of the two parks may take any initiative to propose joint communication and to study possible means of aligning legislation.

3.3.- The two parks approve the principle of an initiative to devise a joint strategic plan for visitor facilities.

In particular, they shall seek, in conjunction with the local authorities and local tourism structures, to network their visitor centres, their information points, their thematic exhibitions and their discovery trails. They shall work together to develop communication hinging on the unity of the protected area and bilingual common documents.

Management and supervision

A steering committee shall be set up with the task of monitoring implementation of the present convention and shall meet at least once a year.

It shall comprise the chairs of the executive boards or administrators designated for this purpose, one administrator of each board and the directors or their representatives. They may coopt thematic project managers as and when necessary and any individual deemed capable of providing useful input.

This committee, to be chaired on an alternating basis by representatives of one or the other park, shall carry out the following tasks in particular:

- act as the secretariat for the agreement,
- determine the actions to be undertaken each year under a pluriannual programme based *inter alia* on preparatory work carried out by the managers of the initiatives concerned,
- prepare the execution of decisions,
- have matters of common interest, presented in the same terms, raised before the executive boards of the two parks.

Each year, the parks shall present, in the same form, a report assessing the actions carried out, a provisional programme of actions to be undertaken and the budget proposed for them. The annual report assessing the actions carried out shall be used as a basis for drawing up the joint annual report for the Council of Europe.

A plenary meeting of project managers shall be held at least once a year so that they can jointly present the results of their shared activities and, where applicable, propose that activities be continued, redeployed or discontinued the following year.

The material produced within the framework of the present agreement shall comply with the rules governing graphics and signage and be subject to the copyright of each establishment.

The present agreement is established for a period of one year and subject to tacit annual renewal until terminated by one of the parties by letter sent to the other party, with such termination taking effect on 31 December of the current exercise.

The directors of each park shall be responsible for the implementation of the agreement and may take any useful measures to amicably resolve disputes that may arise, including via arbitration.

Signed in on

President of the Gran Paradiso National Park

President of the Vanoise National Park

Director of the Gran Paradiso National Park

Director of the Vanoise National Park