

Strasbourg, 30 January 2022

T-PVS/DE(2022)08

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

42nd meeting

Strasbourg, 28 November - 2 December 2022

**REPORT
OF THE ONLINE APPRAISAL
OF THE INDEPENDENT EXPERT
TO THE KRIMML WATERFALLS NATURAL SITE
(Austria)**

22 November 2021

*Document prepared by
Prof. Dr. Maurice Hoffmann (Belgium)*

Table of contents

- 1. EDPA Krimml Waterfalls Natural Site, general information..... 3
- 2. Expert mandate 3
- 3. Online meeting, 22nd November 2021 and abstraction of the annual reports 3
- 4. Conditions and recommendations in the last Resolution CM/ResDip(2012)7 5
- 5. Conditions and recommendations for the 9th renewal of the EDPA of the Krimml Waterfalls until 2027 6

1. EDPA Krimml Waterfalls Natural Site, general information

Name: Krimml Waterfalls Natural Site (Krimmler Wasserfälle)
Postal address: Regional government office of the Land Salzburg, Hohe Tauern National Park Administration Salzburg, Gerlos Straße 18, A-5730 Mittersill
Tel/Facsimile: +43 6562 40849-0 | +43 6562 40849-40
Person responsible: Imre Szarvas
Email: nationalpark@salzburg.gv.at
Internet: www.hohetauern.at

The initial application for the European Diploma of Protected Area was submitted in 1966. The EDPA was awarded by the Council of Europe on the 27 October 1967. Original reasons to award the diploma were the special character of the consecutive waterfalls all together, with an overall height of approx. 400 m. It was praised further for its natural beauty with characteristic surrounding coniferous forest. Since then, the EDPA was renewed eight times (in 1971, 1976, 1980, 1985, 1992, 1997, 2002 and 2012).

2. Expert mandate

The period of validity of the European Diploma of Protected Areas for the Krimml Waterfalls expires on the 27 October 2022. In accordance with the regulations, an on-the-spot appraisal should have been carried out in 2021 to assess the opportunity to renew the EDPA of the Krimml Waterfalls for a ninth time. Unfortunately, the corona pandemic and all associated regulations decided otherwise. They made an on-the-spot-appraisal impossible. Instead an online meeting had to be organised as an exceptional and far from ideal substitute of field excursions and physical meetings with local stakeholders. The online meeting took place on the 22nd November 2021 by the regional manager of the area. Several stakeholders were interviewed during the online meeting.

The expert mandate consisted in evaluating the intrinsic natural values, the conservation status with focus on management aspects of the reserve and its relation with the environment. The specific task of the expert was:

1. Evaluation whether conditions attached to the last renewal were met with (renewal report of 2012);
2. The level of fulfilment of the recommendations attached to the last renewal;
3. Advice on new or supplementary conditions and/or recommendations for the 9th renewal (2022-2027).

Assessing whether recommendations were met was based on the annual reports produced by the site managers since 2012, the literature on the EDPA, and evidently on the results of the online meeting on the 22nd November 2021.

3. Online meeting, 22nd November 2021 and abstraction of the annual reports

The online meeting was organised by Simon KLINGLER MSc, Referatsleiter, Land Salzburg Abteilung 5: Natur- und Umweltschutz, Gewerbe Referat 5/06: Naturschutzgrundlagen und Sachverständigendienst, and regional manager of the EDPA.

We first had a meeting with the park authorities, followed by a discussion with representatives of municipal and regional authorities, and of a forestry representative.

The following people participated in the online meeting:

Simon Klingler, Sebastian Schwaiger, and Martin Klipp, acting on behalf of the park management. Representatives of municipal and regional authorities that participated in the meeting were Johann Schwarzenberger (OeAV), Petra Lemberger (Tourismusverband Krimml), and Angela Waibel of the Forestry organisation. During the meeting Marc Hory of the Secretariat of the Council joined the meeting and participated in the discussion.

The EDPA was introduced with a beautiful and informative film, and several other videos were made available. All of these stress the overall beauty of the natural phenomenon of the three-levelled world-renowned waterfall, the healthy environment and the rich biodiversity.

We had a short interaction on the recommendations of the last renewal. The Management plan 2016-2024 (Salzburger Nationalparkfonds (Hg.) (2017); im Eigenverlag des Salzburger Nationalparkfonds, Mittersill, 148pp.) was shortly mentioned during the introduction. The Krimml Waterfalls are an integral part of the Nationalpark Hohe Tauern, and are mentioned in the management plan of 2017 (covering the period 2016-2024). It is mentioned in the plan as follows:

p.28 “Ein besonderes Augenmerk wird auf die Ausarbeitung gewässerspezifischer Behandlungskonzepte für jeden Hauptbach der Nationalpark-Täler gelegt werden. Dies bezieht beispielsweise bei der Krimmler Ache auch die weltberühmten Krimmler Wasserfälle mit ein, welche zu den am meisten beeindruckenden Naturdenkmälern der Alpen zählen und seit dem Jahr 1967 mit dem Europäischen Naturschutz-Diplom ausgezeichnet sind. Diese internationale Auszeichnung durch den Europarat ist aktuell bis 2022 gültig. Die an diese Verleihung und periodischen Verlängerungen geknüpften Empfehlungen sollen umgesetzt werden, damit einer weiteren Verlängerung dieser hohen Naturschutz-Auszeichnung nichts im Wege steht.”

(Particular attention will be paid to the development of water-specific treatment concepts for each mainstream in the national park valleys. In the case of the Krimmler Ache, for example, this also includes the world-famous Krimml Waterfalls, which are among the most impressive natural monuments in the Alps and have been awarded the European Nature Conservation Diploma since 1967. This international award from the Council of Europe is currently valid until 2022. The recommendations linked to this award and periodic extensions should be implemented so that nothing stands in the way of a further extension of this high nature conservation award.)

The management plan does not treat the EDPA as a separate management unit, but integrates its management in the overall Nationalpark Management. In publications of the Nationalpark Hohe Tauern books are available on Mammals, Butterflies, Plants, Lichens, ... The EDPA annual report of 2018 specifically mentions a study of the ferns of the EDPA (Stöhr, O., 2016. Ferns in the spray: the pteridophyte flora of the Krimml Waterfalls), elaborating the high fern diversity of the area, especially the lower two levels of the waterfall series. Earlier publications are available on e.g. lichens (Türk, R., 1996. Die Flechtenflora im Bereich der Krimmler Wasserfälle. *Wiss.Mitt. Nationalpark Hohe Tauern Bd. 2 (1996): 18 - 30*).

From the interaction with the local and regional authorities, I recall the very positive comments of the OeAV representative Johann Scharzenberger and the local tourism representative Petra Lemberger on cooperation, communication, and intrinsic touristic values. Special appreciation was given to the supra-regional value of the European Diploma. This is explicitly expressed in the special attention that was given to the 50th anniversary of the Krimml Waterfalls European Diploma in 2017 with a supplement of 8 pages to the Nationalpark Magazin. In order to celebrate the 50th anniversary an exhibition was organised, “Panta Rhei – everything is flowing” at the Krimml Municipal Office.

In the consecutive annual reports since 2013, the touristic values of the site were emphasised. Special attention was given by the OeAV to the tourist infrastructure. Special mention was addressed by Mrs. Lemberger to the natural health value of the Krimml Waterfalls area for e.g. allergic asthma.

The representative of the Forest organisation asked that particular attention is paid to potential threats to forest vegetation surrounding the waterfalls, dominated by *Picea abies*. She mentioned invasive bark beetles as a potential threat. Most probably this concerns *Ips typographus* (European spruce bark beetle, Buchdrucker; several fungal pathogens are transmitted to spruces by this invasive beetle) among other bark beetle species. The species is a potential threat throughout most of Europe (with emphasis on the boreal and alpine regions), and might lead to massive die-back of spruce forest. We agreed to specifically mention this potential problem in the recommendations.

Climate change issues

Another issue mentioned during the meeting was the potential threat of flooding events caused by changes in seasonality and intensity of rain or snow fall due to secondary effects of climate change, i.e. potential short, but strong increase in water volumes coming down into the valley of the Krimmler Ache. Flooding is mentioned in the Annual report of 2015 already (“heavy precipitation into the glacier regions led to flood in 2014; the entire “Wasserfallboden” was flooded and the Krimmler Ache made her streambed accordingly).

Not mentioned during the meeting, but equally important regarding climate change are potential changes in flora and fauna of the Krimml Waterfalls area. There are quite extensive inventories of several taxonomic groups available (e.g. lichens; Türk, 1996), but these are relatively old. It would be of added value if new inventories of different taxonomic groups would be organised in order to see whether any trends are appearing.

Finally, the management representatives did not mention specific issues as far as available financial means, field rangers, or general management support is concerned.

4. Conditions and recommendations in the last Resolution CM/ResDip(2012)7

Conditions and recommendations from the **Resolution CM/ResDip(2012)7** on the (8th) renewal of the European Diploma of Protected Areas awarded to the Krimml Waterfalls Natural Site (Austria), adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 20 June 2012 at the 1146th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies¹ were the following:

It does not mention any conditions, nor did earlier resolutions since 1987 do.

Recommendations in Resolution CM/ResDip(2012)7 were:

1. review and, where necessary, improve the regulations of the protected area in order to strengthen the protection status; and devote a part of the management plan of the Hohe Tauern National Park to the Krimml Waterfalls;
2. continue to take appropriate measures in order to preserve the natural beauty of this impressive natural monument for future generations;
3. avoid impacts on the high aesthetic quality of the landscape surrounding the Krimml Waterfalls, especially in the areas around “Wasserfallboden” and “Schönangerl”;
4. maintain great vigilance regarding the development close to the falls, e.g. installations or extension of shops, as well as medical care and new touristic activities (e.g. ice-climbing);
5. avoid as far as possible increasing light pollution;
6. continue to pay close attention to the problem of path erosion; and ensure that visitors only use the existing paths;
7. pursue scientific research and secure funding for studies on regional birdlife, fungi (including lichens) and bryophytes, as a contribution to protect the area’s typical biodiversity;
8. strengthen the co-operation with local stakeholders, especially landowners, the municipality, the Austrian Alpine Association (ÖAV), tourism operators and associations.

¹ The Expert report that will have been the source for the Resolution couldn't be traced anymore, or doesn't exist.

The successive annual reports since the last renewal in 2012 mention all actions that were taken by the management authorities in order to comply with the recommendations. All recommendations were fulfilled except recommendation 5 dealing with light pollution. Obviously, the management takes good care of the EDPA recommendations. At the same time the recommendation given in 2012 remain relevant since they are mostly formulated as stimuli to proceed the way the management acts since long. Therefore, the recommendations for the 9th renewal were updated, while one recommendation was added.

5. Conditions and recommendations for the 9th renewal of the EDPA of the Krimml Waterfalls until 2027

1. Review and, where necessary, improve the regulations of the protected area in order to maintain the protection status, and devote a part of the next management plan (2024 onwards) of the Hohe Tauern National Park to the Krimml Waterfalls, detailing the measures implemented to meet the recommendations attached to the renewal; consider applying for the extension of the European Diploma to the Hohe Tauern National Park;
2. Continue to take appropriate measures in order to preserve the natural beauty of this impressive natural phenomenon for future generations; monitor the potential impact of climate change on the ecosystem, and its fauna and flora; Consider creating a retention basin to avoid flash floods in case of heavy rainfalls;
3. Keep on avoiding impacts on the high aesthetic quality of the landscape surrounding the Krimml Waterfalls, not in the least in the areas around “Wasserfallboden” and “Schönangerl”;
4. Continue to maintain great vigilance regarding infrastructural developments close to the falls, e.g. installations or extension of shops, as well as medical care and new touristic activities that are not compatible with the naturalness of the area;
5. Continue to pay close attention to potential path erosion; and make sure that visitors only use the existing paths;
6. Maintain and further strengthen the co-operation with local stakeholders, especially landowners, the municipality, the Austrian Alpine Association (ÖAV), tourism operators and associations;
7. Further pursue scientific research and secure funding for studies on fauna and flora within the European Diploma holding area, focussing on recurrent monitoring of relevant taxonomic groups in order to evaluate possible effects of changing environmental drivers such as flooding regime, climate change, invasive pathogens, invasive alien species; pay special attention to monitor and manage damaging bark beetles, e.g. *Ips typographus* (European spruce-bark beetle, Buchdrucker);
8. Make use of the European Diploma logo in all information material and brochures, and explain the relevance of the Diploma wherever appropriate, in particular in the visitors' centres and on the website.