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**Committee for the activities of the Council of Europe
in the field of biological and landscape diversity**

(CO-DBP)

Group of specialists – European Diploma for Protected Areas

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**Swiss National Park
(Switzerland)**

RENEWAL

Expert report by
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The Category A European Diploma was awarded to the Swiss National Park in 1967. It has since been renewed.

Having decided to consider renewal of the European Diploma awarded to the Swiss National Park, the Group of Specialists on the European Diploma for Protected Areas entrusted me with the task of carrying out an on-the-spot appraisal in order to compare the present state of the zone with the situation when the Diploma was awarded and successively renewed.

This report sets out the findings of the appraisal, which was carried out on 7 and 8 August 2001.

No Secretariat representative accompanied the expert during the appraisal.

Resolution (97) 16, which was adopted when the Diploma was last renewed, appears in Appendix I. Appendix II contains a draft resolution prepared by the Secretariat for the purpose of a possible extension to the Diploma's validity.

1. Background

1.1. Creation of the National Park

In 1906 a nature protection committee chaired by Dr Paul Sarrazin was set up under the auspices of the Swiss Society of Natural Sciences.

Its numerous projects included the designation of a large nature reserve along the lines of those in the United States.

The area now covered by the park was used by Italian farmers for summer grazing. It appears that problems of a sanitary nature prompted the municipalities owning the land to cancel that agreement with their tenants.

Dr Carl Schroeder and Dr Stephan Brunies, the latter a resident of the Engadine, had noticed the exceptional natural wealth and rare beauty of the site.

In 1909 the Swiss Nature Protection League was set up in order to meet the committee's need for funding. Little by little, the committee was able to rent areas of land.

From 1908 the municipality of Zernez declared itself willing to lease Val Cluozza for 25 years.

When approached for aid, the Swiss Confederation insisted on negotiating with a legal entity. As a result, in 1913 the League adopted a statute and began to operate as an independent company.

On 25 March 1914, the Lower Engadine Park was established by federal decree, with the Confederation covering the cost of land rental and the League taking responsibility for the park's maintenance.

Since 1961, the date of its most recent extension, the Swiss National Park (hereafter SNP) has covered an area of 16,870 ha.

The park was awarded the Category A European Diploma in 1967. Since then the Diploma has been renewed every five years – in 1972, 1977, 1982, 1987, 1992 and 1997. I was responsible for the last two expert appraisals.

For the third time now, the Council of Europe has entrusted me with the task of ascertaining whether the SNP continues to satisfy the conditions for the Diploma's renewal for a further five years.

I visited the site on 7 and 8 August 2001. My instructions were to check whether the recommendations set out in Resolution (97) 16 of 30 September 1997 had been acted upon, these being:

1. that the possibility of establishing a peripheral zone be studied;
2. that adequate co-operation with Stelvio National Park be developed with a view to ensuring, *inter alia*, consistent levels of protection;
3. that the signposting (park entrance) along the Offenpass route be brought into line with current norms, and that an impact study be carried out if the road is widened;
4. that the authorities seek to adapt the park centre so as to improve the presentation of attractive exhibits and, above all, make them accessible to the physically handicapped.

2. Report on the visit

Main points

1. Meeting with the Chair of Lavin municipal council, host of the new extension to the park
2. Meeting with the Chair of Zernez municipal council
3. Meeting in Glurns (Italy) with the Director of Stelvio National Park
4. Visit to God la Schera, the area of the park south of the Ofenpass road
5. Visit to the new park extension, from the Val Zeznina to the Macun plateau

2.1. Meeting with Mr Bonifaci, Chair of Lavin, municipal council, host of the new extension to the park

I first met the park director at the SNP centre and was given a rapid tour of all administrative and technical facilities.

The meeting with Mr Bonifaci gave us an opportunity to see how the proposed extension to the park has been put into effect in Lavin.

Lavin, the only municipality to have agreed to the park's extension on to its territory, has roughly 200 inhabitants. Despite its size it is a very active community, with nine farms, five craft workshops, two shops and three restaurants contributing to a lively village atmosphere.

Residents were invited to consider a proposal for a core zone (the current extension to the park) and a peripheral zone, which was to reach as far as the Alp Zeznina meadowland.

The population hoped to guard against the uncertainties of winter sports facilities and continue to ensure a good level of environmental protection. They also hoped to benefit from the proposal's impact on tourism.

While it is obvious, given the exceptional interest of the site, why the Macun glacial cirque should be included in the core protection zone, the issues raised in connection with the peripheral zone merit far more careful attention.

There were three central concerns: grazing on the Alp Zeznina, logging in municipal forests and the interests of hunters.

In consultation with local farmers, it was proposed to introduce the practice of alternate grazing. The preferred solution was to formalise the current situation within a context of sustainable agriculture by placing restrictions on cattle numbers and grazing periods. Grants were to be made available to ease the transition period.

Since the 1999 storm, forestry management has been affected by the low price of timber. Under the proposal, certain zones (a third of the total area) with unusual plant associations were to be set aside, while year-round logging was to take place more or less intensively in the remaining forest. Studies were carried out in close conjunction with the municipality and the local forestry department.

Hunting is a strong local tradition. Anyone with a hunting licence, which is valid throughout the canton, can hunt wherever he/she wishes as long as the rules governing the hunting season, authorised species and quotas are respected.

It was agreed that hunting would continue to be allowed in the peripheral zone, subject to its officialisation.

Roads have been closed off and traffic restricted ever since new forestry legislation came into force in 1977.

Lavin municipality amended its original plans when neighbouring municipalities rejected the extension proposal. In the end, only the Macun glacial cirque was incorporated into the park, and the status of the proposed peripheral zone, which is too isolated from the main area of the park, has remained unchanged.

2.2. Meeting with the Chair of Zernez municipal council

We were welcomed at the town hall by the mayor, Mr Domenic Toutsch, with whom we discussed the sensitive issue of the rejected proposal to extend the SNP.

Some 68% of the park area lies within the municipality of Zernez, which is bound by a perpetual lease waiving all farming rights over the land surrendered. The mayor said that there were considerable economic spin-offs from the park (120,000 hotel bookings per year) and that residents of the municipality had an interest in its continued existence. Consequently, restrictions linked to the park were accepted without complaint. Paradoxically, there had been less enthusiasm about the extension proposal.

The population had voted overwhelmingly against the proposal in the form presented. The council, which supported the proposal, had not expected its rejection and still could not fully understand the reasons why.

The mayor felt that the proposal had doubtless been poorly presented. He was at a loss to understand why certain businesses had taken an active part in the rejection campaign. Feelings had been much stirred up by the media, probably strengthening the views of the opposition.

A brief look at the proposal for a peripheral zone reveals that it would have meant a number of restrictions on traffic, logging and hunting. The last-mentioned was probably the most significant factor.

In addition, one has the impression that the park authorities drew up the proposal for the zone's management without properly consulting the local forestry department, which is a statutory partner in the park.

Although I asked on several occasions to meet a local forestry department representative, nothing was done about my request.

Zernez municipality, which is already the biggest landowner in the park, was once again put under heavy pressure. By rejecting the proposal, the municipality ensured that it was unlikely to succeed.

To conclude our meeting, the mayor took us on a tour of Zernez town hall. The municipal council has occupied Planta-Wildenberg Castle, which is named in memory of its former owners, since 1956.

The castle is an imposing building at the heart of Zernez's historic centre. Originally the residence of the Wildenberg family, in 1288 the castle became the property of the bishopric of Chur, whence it passed to the Planta family.

Mr Toutsch told us during our visit that the municipality was thinking of offering the complex to the SNP for use as the park's headquarters. This proposal would be put to the SNP board for a decision.

Without wishing to prejudge the decision, I would observe that the proposal would enable the park centre to be located right on the main crossroads in the town centre. In line with the fourth recommendation, the spacious outbuildings could be converted into a reception centre for the general public. Despite the magnanimity of this gesture on the part of the principal municipality in the park, it should not be forgotten that Zernez played a significant part in the failure of the extension proposal.

2.3. Meeting in Glurns (Italy) with the Director of Stelvio National Park

Stelvio National Park covers 134,000 ha in three provinces – South Tyrol, Lombardy and the autonomous province of Trentino.

The park was established by order of Mussolini without consulting the population.

Under the 1993 Act, responsibility for national parks, which previously lay with the national forestry administration, was transferred to the provinces. Consequently, the park is now controlled by the three provinces on whose territory it lies, the regional forestry departments having taken over the duties of the national administration.

This arrangement has made it necessary to set up a supra-regional structure, and the future promises a coherent overall approach. Coherence is overseen by a consortium under the Director, Mr Karner.

The consortium consists of a representative of the National Parks Authority and one from each of the three regions concerned. Its headquarters are in Bormio, with a park office in each of the provinces.

There are still considerable differences from one province to another. While forestry department supervision is of a structural nature in Trentino and South Tyrol, in Lombardy it is functional only and directly dependent on the State.

Links with the SNP take the form of joint field trips on which the staff of the two parks receive training.

The SNP helped Stelvio Park with the release of two young bearded eagles (*Gypaetus barbatus*).

There is cross-border telemetric monitoring of deer and ibex, and co-operation focuses on the large herbivores and birds of prey.

On my previous visit I had met Mr Montana, then consortium chair, who had explained his hopes for the park's future and his desire to set up a core zone along the common border with the SNP. This idea has been taken further. Under the current proposal, which should become a reality between 2002 and 2005, the core zone would be located on either side of the Livigno reservoir to the south of the Punt dal Gall tunnel exit. It would include the Cima del Fopel opposite the Val Trupchun, Monte Cassa del Ferro and Monte la Tagliate to the south of Munt la Schera.

Paradoxically, one area of Swiss territory measuring about 100 ha at the Punt dal Gall tunnel exit in the Livigno valley would remain enclaved between two core zones. At present there are no specific conservation measures on this small area of land, where for example hunting is allowed despite its being prohibited in the surrounding area.

Far more frequent contact between the two parks is favouring the organisation of joint projects such as one currently being run with Interreg funding to reduce traffic density.

I am pleased to note how co-operation is progressing, and it would certainly be worth encouraging Stelvio Park to apply at the appropriate time for this zone to be awarded the European Diploma.

2.4. Visit to God la Schera, the area of the park south of the Offenpass road

I made the short detour to God la Schera in order to discover a part of the park unfamiliar to me. Since it was not planned in advance, the visit was rather basic. We began at the Pont la Drossa toll station for the Livigno tunnel and traversed the north-western flanks of Mont la Schera. The area is wooded, but it has not been logged for a long time and its cultivation in clumps is highly characteristic of the natural pattern of stands of this sort.

The paths are continuously maintained in order to minimise the impact of erosion caused by the many visitors. As on my previous visit in another sector, I was able to observe that the public are careful to respect the restrictions placed on them by the park management.

2.5. Visit to the new park extension, from Val Zeznina to the Macun plateau

The Macun cirque is reached from the Alp Zeznina. The path climbs through the meadows to the Cavagliet rock bar, which marks the approximate northern limit of the new extension.

The Macun glacial cirque, which was included in the SNP on 1 August 2000, covers an area of 3.6 km². Although relatively small, it contributes in a new way to the park.

This glacial formation consists of 23 pools in a hollow of crystalline rock located at an altitude of more than 2,600 metres. When we visited there were some remaining patches of snow. At this elevation the first frosts occur in September. The brief growing season limits what can grow to a very specific range of flora. For example, glacier crowfoot (*Ranunculus glacialis*) is very common here although absent elsewhere in the SNP. The type of rock too is a contributing factor, as the acidic soil contrasts with that found on the limestone in the rest of the park.

Little known to tourists, the cirque is the jewel in the crown of the Diploma area, and it is regrettable that it should be isolated from the rest of the protected zone, which at its closest point is 3.6 km distant in a straight line.

I cannot but support the Diploma's extension to this new part of the park.

2.6. Conclusion

To conclude the appraisal, we spent some time at the end of the second day discussing all the matters broached. The exchange was fruitful, indicating a desire for co-operation with the expert.

The appointment five years ago of a new director consolidated the foundations for change initially laid by Mr Robbin. In addition, the appointment of a deputy director and the introduction of a proper organisational structure give the new director new support which now he could not do without.

Staff numbers have risen, yet they are still not entirely adequate to requirements. As the park grows, new responsibilities and therefore new needs are coming to light. Current efforts must be sustained.

Signposting within the park has been very tastefully altered, bringing it wholly into line with the third recommendation of the last resolution.

Particular trouble has been taken to meet the recommendations attached to the last renewal.

A special effort should be made to determine why the extension proposal failed. The park management must take advantage of the positive effect of media interest in this setback to consider setting up a peripheral zone, which has never been so badly needed.

The Swiss National Park continues to survive and accomplish the tasks set for it. Today, just as it did five years ago, it meets the criteria for renewal of the Category A European Diploma. Subject to certain recommendations, it complies with all the conditions for a new five-year period.

The draft resolution seeks to emphasise the following specific points:

1. elimination of the enclave near the Punt dal Gall on the southern slopes of Mont la Schera by incorporating it into the core zone;
2. the absence of a peripheral zone, principally along the narrowest sectors of the park, is increasingly noticeable. In the wake of the new extension, priority consideration should be given to setting up such a zone;
3. the proposal made by Zernez municipality concerning the park headquarters must be considered in the light of current limits on the expansion of the existing premises;
4. the need to consider the possibility of connecting the new extension to the rest of the park by means of a core zone;
5. the overriding importance of nurturing co-operation with Stelvio National Park.

Appendix I

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

RESOLUTION (97) 16

ON THE RENEWAL OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA AWARDED TO THE SWISS NATIONAL PARK (Switzerland)

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

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

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

Having regard to Resolution (67) 23 awarding the European Diploma to the Swiss National Park;

Having regard to the proposals of the Bureau of the Committee for the activities of the Council of Europe in the field of biological and landscape diversity (BU-DBP);

Renews the European Diploma awarded to the Swiss National Park in category A, until 27 October 2002;

Attaches to the renewal the following recommendations, that:

1. the possibility of establishing a peripheral zone be studied;
2. adequate co-operation with Stelvio National Park be developed with a view to ensuring, *inter alia*, consistent levels of protection;
3. the signposting (park entrance) along the Offenpass route be brought into line with current norms, and that an impact study be carried out if the route is enlarged;
4. the authorities seek to adapt the park centre so as to improve the presentation of attractive exhibits and, above all, make them accessible to the physically handicapped.

Appendix II

DRAFT RESOLUTION

ON THE RENEWAL OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA FOR PROTECTED AREAS TO THE SWISS NATIONAL PARK (Switzerland)

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

Having regard to Resolution (65) 6 instituting the European Diploma, as amended by Resolution (98) 29 on the Regulations for the European Diploma of Protected Areas;

Having regard to Resolution (67) 23 awarding the European Diploma to the Swiss National Park;

Having regard to the proposals of the Committee for the activities of the Council of Europe in the field of biological and landscape diversity (CO-DBP);

Taking into consideration the expert's report presented at the meeting of the Group of specialists – European Diploma for Protected Areas on 28 and 29 January 2002;

Renews the European Diploma awarded to the Swiss National Park until 27 October 2007;

Attaches the following recommendations to the renewal:

1. elimination of the enclave near the Punt dal Gall on the southern slopes of Mont la Schera by incorporating it into the core zone;
2. the absence of a peripheral zone, principally along the narrowest sectors of the park, is increasingly noticeable. In the wake of the new extension, priority consideration should be given to setting up such a zone;
3. the proposal made by Zernez municipality concerning the park headquarters must be considered in the light of current limits on the expansion of the existing premises;
4. the need to consider the possibility of connecting the new extension to the rest of the park by means of a core zone;
5. the overriding importance of nurturing co-operation with Stelvio National Park.