

COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FOR THE CONSERVATION OF NATURE
AND NATURAL RESOURCES

HAUTES FAGNES NATURE RESERVE
(Belgium)

On-the-spot appraisal
by the Secretariat

Secretariat memorandum
by the Directorate of Environment and Local Authorities

4.256
09.3

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1. Background

The European Diploma was awarded to the Hautes Fagnes Nature Reserve in Category A in 1966 and has since been regularly renewed every 5 years.

Since the present Diploma expires in 1986, a further on-the-spot appraisal was carried out, in accordance with the Diploma regulations, on 26-27 July 1984, by Mr Broggi and Mr Baum. They were accompanied during their visit by Mr Letocart, Principal Engineer in the Aupen Forestry Office.

Thanks are due to him for his friendly welcome, his co-operation and the time he willingly gave up to provide all the necessary information.

The purpose of this report is not to describe the reserve and its condition. That information will be found in the annual reports submitted to the committee by the management.

Since it is a question of renewal, the purpose of the visit was to establish to what extent the present situation corresponds with that at the most recent renewal in 1981 and to recommend any necessary measures for the forthcoming period.

The regulation criteria for category A are the main points of reference, as that is the category for which the Diploma was awarded.

2. Opinion concerning renewal of the Diploma

2.1 Conservation of eco-systems

The characteristic types of vegetation in the Hautes Fagnes, described in several publications and reports, appear to be well-preserved. No substantial negative developments in the situation appear to have occurred. The problems arising locally, such as progressive recolonisation by ligneous plants and damage caused to vegetation by trampling, are dealt with satisfactorily by the management, which is aware of them and takes active measures to combat them (see annual report point 1.2). Nor should it be forgotten that Prof. Noifalisse, one of Europe's most renowned ecologists, has been directly involved as Chairman in the management of the reserve.

Despite growing numbers of visitors to the reserve and its surroundings, no change has been reported in either large fauna or bird species since the last visit in 1979. The number of black grouse (*Lyrurus tetrix*) seems stable (see also annual report point 1.3), which is important and a very positive sign for the reserve as a whole.

There are some indications that the numbers of large game (red deer and roe deer) is too high in the region, which might have some effect on the reserve.

3.1 Fires

Fire has been one of the most worrying problems and remains one of the principal dangers to the Fagnes. Fire prevention is, however, excellently organised and could serve as an example for nature reserves elsewhere in Europe. As a result, over the last 10 years, there has been no serious fire in the reserve. Extensive measures are taken to prevent and combat fires.

3.3 Protection measures

The protection measures in force ought to suffice to deal with the problems of cranberry and bilberry picking and langlauf skiing. However, they cannot be fully enforced owing to shortage of staff.

3.4 Information

Although the reserve does not have an information centre of its own, information about the reserve is specifically provided by the "Centre Nature de Botrange", inaugurated in April 1984. This is a large complex which fits well into the landscape and has an impressive stock of information material on the whole region (see also point 1.4 of the annual report).

4. Conclusion

Renewal should be made subject to the following recommendation:

- 4.1.1 draw up a plan of management, based on an analysis of ecological assets and indicating management possibilities for maintaining the typical open aspect of the various types of vegetation in the Hautes Fagnes.