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EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FOR THE CONSERVATION
OF NATURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

WORKING PARTY - EUROPEAN DIPLOMA

ON-THE-SPOT APPRAISAL OF THE
SWISS NATIONAL PARK

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I. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The European Diploma was awarded to the Swiss National Park on 27 October 1967 and renewed on 16 October 1972.

The validity of this diploma expires in 1977 and, in accordance with the regulations laid down in Resolution (73) 4, the European committee should, during the fifth year, consider whether to extend its validity for a further period of 5 years. With this in view, an expert is commissioned to make a fresh appraisal on the spot, taking particular account of the information provided in the annual reports.

This task has been entrusted to me by the General Secretariat, in a letter dated 9 June 1976, with the following terms of reference:

- to examine the present state of the site and to see whether it has remained the same or whether it has improved or deteriorated since the diploma was awarded or since the date of the first renewal;
- to analyse the state of conservation of the flora, fauna and landscape (development of regression of species);
- to examine the improvements (material, legislative) carried out or under way;
- to study the effect of the public on the flora, fauna and landscape to make proposals for improving the situation;
- to examine the funds provided for the management of the area.

I carried out an on-the-spot appraisal on 20 and 21 July 1976, in the company of Mr P Baum, a member of the Secretariat. We were received and taken round by Dr. R Schloeth, warden of the park.

We visited the Il Fuorn Valley (road to Ofenberg), the Grimmels Alps, the ecological footpath and the Stabelchod meadows, the Schera Alp and the park house. Unfortunately, bad weather prevented us from visiting other parts of the grounds.

II. FINDINGS

The findings of this mission are based on the observations we made during our visit to the grounds and to the park house, our conversations with Dr. Schloeth, and the information we obtained from studying the annual reports since 1970 and the report of the Federal Commission for the Swiss National Park.

1. CONDITION OF THE SITE

The protective measures put into operation since the creation of the park, and more particularly during the last decade, have proven very effective in preserving a site where nature has taken over entirely without human intervention. There is no noticeable change in the appearance of the site, except of course for the line of the road to Ofenberg (Il Fuorn) and the Ova Spin overspill basin.

2. CONSERVATION OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

2.1. FLORA

All the flora are in a normal and satisfactory condition. There are signs, however, of a slow impoverishment in some of the meadows due to over-grazing by deer and chamois, with a reduction in the number of plant species and the appearance of tares.

Mr Bortolotti already pointed out in 1971 how very interesting the vegetation was as regards both the quality of the groups of plants and the opportunities for watching their evolution, as, for example, the planting of larches or arolla pines in the decaying mountain pine-forests. These are very attractive elements in introducing the public to nature, and are seen to particularly good advantage from the ecological footpath recently opened up in the Il Fuorn sector.

2.2. FAUNA

No fundamental changes are to be observed since 5 years' ago in the composition of the fauna, bearing in mind the effects of the climate.

Numbers: These are fairly stable, the reduction noticed in 1970 after a particularly severe winter having been almost made up since then.

Chamois: about 1,000 in 1972-73 and 1,100 in 1974-75;
Ibex: slightly fewer, 175 in 1972, 153 in 1975;
Roe-deer: between 40 and 60;
Red deer: the decrease to 1,540 in 1970 has been rapidly made up to about 2,000 in 1972 and has since remained at that level.

Red deer: The overall number of Red deer in the whole region has remained at about 5,000 for the last 4 years, thanks to the partial application of certain measures which just offset normal growth.

It is absolutely essential now to reduce the herd to a much lower level, because the amount of damage done by the Red deer is increasingly expensive entailing grants of around 150,000 Swiss Francs, which is becoming an excessive burden for the Confederation.

There must be a determined effort to bring about this reduction - by measures such as prolonging the hunting season, delaying the opening of the close season, increased culling, etc, and these must be put into operation outside the national park, since, in the park itself, culling must be undertaken very selectively and circumspectly, only a few dozen beasts being culled each year to remove the injured, sick or deformed animals, for the improvement of the fauna.

Reintroduction of the lynx: This does not seem possible. A pair of lynx were smuggled into the park by the WWF in October 1972, but departed separately and very quickly, as they no doubt found living conditions unsuited to them.

So far as ibex are concerned, the park seems to attract them increasingly in the winter, because the places they like are more and more occupied in summer by deer. Attempts to bring them back into the park (Il Fuorn district) are not yet entirely satisfactory.

3. IMPROVEMENTS IN THE PARK

- The signposting of the 80 km of paths in the park, which are very well-maintained, was improved in 1971, thanks to the co-operation of the Cantonal Rambling Association, by the erection of aluminium posts of the same kind as those used for all the rambling paths in the canton.
- Footpaths have been laid out along the Il Fuorn route, from P6 to P9, to prevent ramblers having to take to the road.
- There has been no extension to the car park since 1970, though there have been a few improvements of detail (barriers, dustbins, and containers for removing rubbish).
- The hut on the Grimmels Alp has been knocked down and replaced by a shelter, appreciated by ramblers.
- One important achievement, just completed the week before our inspection, is an ecological footpath (naturlehrpfad) starting from P6 at Il Fuorn and taking the footpath from P6 to P9, the Margunet circuit and the Stablechod meadows. We consider this a model piece of work, both because of its quality - 50 aluminium signboards screwed to wooden posts, with inscriptions photographed by electrolysis - and because of the clarity of the text in

3 languages and the beauty of the drawings which illustrate the natural phenomena or the biological associations described. This footpath is already a great success with visitors.

We are in complete agreement with the policy pursued by the warden of the national park, who believes that nothing new should be done inside the park and that visitors should be satisfied with what already exists, since that is quite sufficient. On the other hand, he believes that rambling facilities should be developed in the whole area around the park, since it too is of great importance from the scientific and scenic points of view. It is for the communes and the canton to make these footpaths and, if necessary, to lay out new car parks outside the national park, but certainly not inside it.

4. LEGAL STATUS

There has been no change in the existing status of the park, which is based on the Federal Decree of 7 October 1959 and the agreements made in 1958 and 1959 with various communes.

The conversion of the present machinery - Federal National Park Commission, Committee for Scientific Study - into a foundation has been under consideration for 2 years. It seems to us desirable that the Swiss National Park should be given real legal personality, and the warden, who would then become a director, more extensive powers for managing and improving the park. Here, it would seem that the Federal Commission does not always appreciate the specific problems involved by management and improvement on the ground. A small administrative and accountancy department of its own should also be installed in the park house at Zernez.

If a new structure of that kind were to be established, the house at Zernez also should be managed by the new foundation, which should become the owner of the National Park Fund shares.

In the meantime, it might certainly be useful for the members of the Federal Commission and the warden to establish contact with those responsible for managing the other Alpine parks, Vanoise and Ecrins in France, and Gran Paradiso and Stelvio in Italy.

5. PUBLIC ACCESS TO THE NATIONAL PARK

5.1. NUMBER OF VISITORS

After a very large increase between 1965 (150,000) and 1971 (270,000), the number of visitors has levelled off at 280,000 a year, except for 1974, when there were only 233,000 visitors because of the bad short summer.

It has to be admitted that the numbers visiting the park have not increased much in the last 5 years, although motor traffic has gone up enormously, largely owing to the tunnel on the private road to Punt del Gall.

The presence of so many visitors, kept well to the park's own footpaths, does not in my opinion cause any risk of deterioration for the area, provided constant supervision is maintained and even slightly increased in the most frequented areas, such as Il Fuorn. If there is a large increase in the number of visitors in future, as many as possible should be sent outside the park (cf end of para 3) or concentrated in biologically least sensitive areas.

5.2. THE INFORMATION FOR VISITORS has been greatly improved:

- by the provision of noticeboards at the start of the footpaths through the park;
- by the park house at Zernez, which has a very full exhibition, and where films and slides can be shown etc, (about 25,000 visitors a year);
- by putting on sale to the public:
 - . an official guide in 3 languages;
 - . a simplified leaflet giving the rules and a plan of the various walks;
 - . a detailed map on scale 1/50,000 and another map on scale 1/100,000;
- by strengthening the supervisory staff available to guide and inform visitors to the grounds; there are at the moment 5 permanent rangers and 5 seasonal rangers employed each year from May to October.

I think it would be useful to make available to visitors monographs on the fauna and flora and their associations in the park.

It should be mentioned that the tourist offices in the Engadine Valley organise guided zoological tours of the park every year with the help of the warden, and this year a general information folder has been prepared.

It would be a good thing if these visits were more specifically directed towards an understanding of nature. This would involve some additional training for the guides, and consideration should be given to participation by the park staff.

A final method of increasing the public's knowledge of the richness and vulnerability of the natural environment would be for the warden to acquire in the near future one or two qualified assistants with a training in ecology, so that information and interpretation (in the American sense of the word) may be available to the public in the grounds. This would increase the rangers' work very considerably while decentralising the activities of the park house at Zernez.

5.3. OFFENCES COMMITTED IN THE PARK

In relation to the number of visitors, the offences have fallen in proportion to between 40 and 50 a year (straying from the footpaths, picking flowers, bringing dogs into the park, lighting fires, poaching, miscellaneous).

Poaching is practically non-existent in most of the park, and has dropped a lot since 1970 in the Italian frontier area because of increased supervision and the creation of a hunting reserve in the Val Livigno.

Generally speaking, the public are well-behaved and the park is very clean, as ramblers have to take their rubbish away with them (no dustbins inside the park).

5.4. THE CONTROL OF MOTOR TRAFFIC is not within the competence of the Federal Commission for the national park. As Mr Bortolotti pointed out in 1971, we feel that, for the safety both of people and of animals, and to ensure a minimum of peace and quiet in the sector the road runs through, the cantonal authorities should fix a speed limit of 70 kmh on the whole length of the Il Fuorn road that traverses the park.

6. FUNDS FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF THE NATIONAL PARK

The annual expenditure of the Federal Commission for the Swiss National Park has increased considerably in the last 5 years: 290,000 Swiss Francs in 1970, 460,000 in 1974, and about 485,000 in 1975.

The growth in expenditure is practically all due to the cost of supervision and reflects the increase in the size of the staff and the use of the park vehicle.

To this should be added the subsidies paid by the Confederation to the communes (150,000 Swiss Francs in 1975, as against 85,000 in 1970 to 1974) and compensation for damage done by Red deer (130,000 Swiss Francs in 1974, nearly 150,000 in 1975).

Expenditure on research has doubled in 5 years.

The income comes from:

- the Confederation;
- the Swiss League for Nature Conservation;
- interest on the National Park Fund;
- donations from foundations.

The funds provided are sufficient to ensure good management of the National Park and the pursuit of a scientific work programme.

Interest on the National Park Fund - the capital invested in it had reached 1,337,000 Swiss Francs on 31 December 1974 - is used for the running expenses of the park. In 1974, it amounted to 59,000 Swiss Francs.

It should be noted that the cost of running the park house at Zernez, which is managed by a special foundation, is entirely covered by receipts from the sale of post cards, pamphlets and books, and from entrance fees for the exhibition and film shows.

7. SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Every year about 30 research workers, under the supervision of the Committee for the Scientific Study of the Swiss National Park, are allowed to study the fauna and flora inside the park. Between 1971 and 1975, 17 scientific studies carried out in the park were published by the Committee of the Swiss Natural Science Society, which brings the number of scientific publications on the park to nearly 80.

Furthermore, the scientific committee has decided to launch 3 major long-term interdisciplinary study programmes on the following subjects:

- the Alpine grass areas;
- the forests;
- the Red deer.

8. IMPACT OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA

There has been practically no impact since the interest taken by the public at the time the diploma was awarded.

III. CONCLUSIONS

The Swiss National Park has been very successful in preserving the natural conditions described in previous reports since the first renewal. In these circumstances, and in view of the great value of the park, I consider that an extension of the validity of the European Diploma for another 5 years is to be recommended.

I would like, however, in concluding this report, to make some suggestions and proposals based on the observations made in the previous section.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- To maintain in all circumstances the status of a reserve left to its natural development which the 16,870 hectares of the Swiss National Park now enjoy;
- to provide the Swiss National Park with legal personality by ensuring that the Swiss Government's studies on the subject come to early fruition;
- not to provide any new facilities in the park (footpaths or car parks), but to make ecological footpaths like that of Il Fuorn in other parts of the park suited to them;
- to study and implement outside the National Park the measures necessary to bring about a considerable reduction in the number of deer in the whole of the Engadine, and then to stabilise it at a much lower level than at present;
- to improve the information facilities at the warden's disposal by producing popular booklets and recruiting one or two advisers - "interpreters";
- to impose a 70 kph speed limit on the whole length of the Il Fuorn road that goes through the park.

2. SUGGESTIONS

- Under the responsibility of the communes in the Engadine to make some improvements for the benefit of tourists outside the park, so as to reduce the pressure of tourism on the park itself;
- to endow the warden with greater responsibilities for the management of the park by setting up an administrative and accounting department in the park house at Zernez, thus making it the park headquarters;
- to organise contact and consultation between the managers of the Swiss National Park (Federal Commission and warden) and those of the Italian and French Alpine National Parks;
- to place more emphasis on a knowledge of the natural environment in guided tours of the park organised by the tourist offices of the valley;
- along with Italy, to study the possibility of extending the Stelvio National Park within the next few years to the Swiss frontier and the Swiss National Park, so as to make a continuous area of conservation with national park status.