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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
of Protected Areas**

SEITSEMINEN NATIONAL PARK

(Finland)

RENEWAL OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA

Appraisal Report by

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The European Diploma for Protected Areas was awarded to the Seitseminen National Park in 1996. It was the first renewal.

The secretariat did not accompany the expert on his visit to the park.

Appendix I contains Resolution (96) 29, which was adopted when the Diploma was awarded. Appendix II contains a draft resolution prepared by the Secretariat for the purpose of the renewal.

I. Introduction

In order to enable the Council of Europe to decide on the renewal of the European Diploma through its Group of Specialists on Protected Areas (PE-S-ZP), we present in this report the conclusions of the on-the-spot appraisal, carried out on 12 and 13 July 2000.

Our sincere thanks go to the Metsähallitus staff: dr. Jorma Koivorinne and head ranger Pekka Vesterinen, assisted by biologist Tuula Peltonen. They indeed managed our stay in the Park most efficiently and they kindly offered supplementary opportunity to get information on the Forest research Institute in Parkano and to visit the Lahanvuori National Park as well.

The meeting with dr. Rauno Vaisänen (director, Environment Ministry) and Prof. Heikki Toivonen (Finnish Environment Institute) enabled us to discuss both administrative and scientific matters in more general terms. A closing session with a press meeting was very successful and resulted in positive newspaper articles.

II. Objectives of the appraisal

The experts' visit aimed to assess the actual state and ecological conditions of the site as well as the realisations and problems in the fields of management, research and education in this first period after the European Diploma was awarded. These are described in detail in the application reports, the annual reports 1996-1999 and in the National Park Master Plan.

The regulations concerning land use, tourism, hunting and fishing and the views on the future development plans of the National Park were discussed.

III. General Situation of the Seitsemien National Park

Location, ownership, status and objectives:

Established in 1982, the National Park covers an area of 4180 ha. It is located in the municipalities of Kuru and Ikaalinen, east of Parkano. The main visitors centre is situated on the Kulamäki hill next to Länsi-Aure. The whole is under the administration of Metsähallitus, the former Forest and Park Service (West Finland Park Area) who also manages this area and neighbouring national parks.

Before the creation of the Seitsemien National Park, protected areas existed already, such as the Multiharju primaeval forest (1910!) and the Kivineva virgin peat land (1964); most other parts were used for commercial forestry until 1976.

The Park has been proposed since 1998 as one of the Natura 2000 sites of Finland.

The National Park is state owned and economic activities affecting nature are not allowed. Main objectives and aims are protection of biodiversity, the restoration of the natural state of specific habitats, the maintenance of cultural heritage landscapes and increase attractiveness for visitors by offering hiking trails, signposted paths and accommodation, such as camping sites, wood cabins, shelter and fishing facilities. The recreational use of the Park, however, is kept in balance with the ecological carrying capacity. Hunting inside the Park is forbidden.

Ecological and landscape characteristics:

The Park is a representative example of the central boreal vegetation zone in the southern part of

Finland because of its large forest cover (51%), the abundance of peat lands (45%), small water bodies (1%) and typical landforms such as glaciofluvial eskers. The soil is predominantly of moraine type.

The forests are characterised by the occurrence of complex ecological structures composed of all age classes of trees and undercover. Relicts of old-grown forest are to be found despite the long tradition of forestry. Most common are Scots pine, Spruce and Snags (at some spots also Birch woods occur), some of them being 400 years old. Decaying wood covered by a rich vegetation with abundant fern and moss flora is a signal of maturity of the ecosystem. These small primeval forests (e.g. Multiharju) are to be considered as core areas for the restoration of the surrounding middle-aged woods or younger commercial plantations less than 100 years old.

Typical and rare birds breeding and other fauna elements are to be found, such as Ural Owl (*Strix uralensis*) and Three-toed Woodpecker (*Picoides tridactylus*), Flying squirrel (*Pteromys volans*) and Marten (*Martes martes*). Also the invertebrate fauna is extremely diverse as a result of the amount of undisturbed decaying wood.

Large parts of the Park are covered by peat lands of high conservation value; many of them were formerly drained and are now subject of successful restoration. Typical breeding birds of these open areas are Willow grouse (*Lagopus lagopus*), Golden plover (*Charadrius apricarius*) and Crane (*Grus grus*). Along the shores of lakes and fens with Sphagnum spp., Eriophorum spp. and Carex-vegetations, the nesting Whooper Swans (*Cygnus cygnus*) and Red-throated Divers (*Gavia stellata*) can be observed.

From both a geomorphologic and an ecological viewpoint, most important and impressive landforms are the eskers, with differences in vegetation depending on the soil composition and exposition of the slopes, creating interesting supplementary landscape ecological variety.

Some parts of the National Park actually represent historic landscapes (0,1%), where traditional cultivation took place during almost one century. The crown estate of Kovero is an attractive site with old houses and barns; permanent meadows and extensively used or abandoned fields have their own flora and fauna.

Due to the variety of natural habitats and semi-natural landscapes from former agricultural land-use and settlements, the Park is representing a remarkable diversity of biotopes with occurrence of many rare and threatened species. At the same time it offers historic values.

Public access, recreation and use of nature:

A network of old forest roads and hiking trails crosses the Park, enabling people to enjoy the attractive and varied landscape. Services such as visitors centres (Kulomäki and the ecomuseum of Kovero), signposted nature trails, fire places, shelters, forest cabins (Pitkäjärvi) and small camping sites have been gradually established. In order to reduce the recreational pressure on more vulnerable zones these services are carefully located at a distance.

Five separate remote areas (1445 ha) have no constructions for visitors at all in order to keep the places as wild as possible. Four restricted zones have been designated (546 ha) where access is only permitted along marked trails.

A specific management effort had resulted in the closure of some roads through the park (especially in the E-parts), others remain open for restricted motorised traffic. Horse riding and bicycling is allowed along existing roads or some trails.

Increasing number of tourists, schools and other groups visiting the Park and its centres (actually

35000/y) illustrate its important social function. This must be kept in balance with the natural carrying capacity of some ecosystems and landscapes characteristics. Translocation of some activities in zones outside the park has been advised as a sound solution.

As an example of controversial use, the angling with artificial restocking was discussed at the time of Diploma award. This activity at Kirkas-Soljanen was facilitated by a boardwalk around the lake, causing disturbance of the shore vegetation, the surrounding peatland and some nesting birds. It was advised in 1996 to stop this activity and to relocate these facilities outside the National Park. This recommendation was followed with great success, the natural situation rapidly restoring indeed. The relocation did not take place and was not asked for by the public.

The Park authorities were also advised by that time to reduce the number of fishing and walking facilities along the shore of the lakes vulnerable to erosion (duckboards etc.) and to restrict the accessible parts, thus avoiding disturbance of peat land fauna and flora. Nowadays former roads and forest paths are gradually closed in some remote parts of the Park.

The further 'use' of nature is strictly regulated. Only mushroom and berry picking is freely allowed in accessible parts. Hunting is forbidden; Elk (*Alces alces*) may be driven out of the protected area but shooting is not allowed.

Education:

The National Park became well known as an area for school education and university training. The main information and visitors centre of Kulomäki was opened in 1989 and is at present an excellent example how nature information can be presented, with accessible forest and peat land trails, equipped accommodation for students, seminars and training, as well as housing for guides, staff and researchers. The attractive ('interactive') exhibition on the natural history of all kinds of surrounding landscapes and the necessary instruction materials for different age-classes at schools are regularly improved (nature library, slides, thematic video on forests, maps and booklets). Especially for younger children remarkable efforts are successfully made.

The historic farm of Kovero functions as an interesting 'ecomuseum' with authentic historical objects illustrating the old traditions. This cultural estate is very well integrated in the surrounding crown forest and semi-natural landscapes. Other historic sites with ruins, old dams or mills are being restored as well. A good example is the former Kortosalu farm (built in 1937, used until 1980s) where a school camp site with 26 beds developed successfully as a self supporting centre, after it had been rebuilt with input from Ministry of Labour). The road passing this point has been by-passed in order to increase safety and quiet surrounding. Some smaller information points have been established along the nature trails. An interesting report on 'Nature instruction' has been prepared and envisages the approach of several target groups.

Unfortunately, the education programs cannot develop at the same rate as the increasing public interest, because of limited personnel available (especially in the tourism peak season, but also during winter when cross country sky trips are very popular). (See also under 10.)

Research and nature management:

Important ecological research through several studies has contributed to nature management (e.g. the effects of forest fragmentation, monitoring of water quality, ornithological censuses and invertebrate studies). Most are carried out by the University of Helsinki and the Finnish Environment Institute or by the Forest and Park Service, which is responsible for basic monitoring of endangered or threatened species and habitats.

A network of permanent plots for multi-disciplinary analysis of ecological data is to be recommended in order to take profit of the opportunities offered by the extreme biodiversity of old forests and both virgin or disturbed peat lands. Monitoring also must include the effects of management and recreation pressure.

The priority nature management of the Park is still focussed on restoration of formerly drained peat land, an increasing surface having been managed after the first attempts at the time of the Diploma award. The results are very positive indeed, the restoration of water levels by filling up of former drainage ditches is a remarkable contribution to the biodiversity conservation and restoration of the Park peat lands as a whole. The costs are about 300 Fim /ha. and the total area to be restored is planned at 1300 ha, of which about 800 have been finalised.

In some raised bogs some younger pine plantations (30 years old) have been removed by cutting and burning (costs 3000 Fim/ha). The first experiments of burning trees after cutting as observed in 1996 turned to be very successful with decaying wood (interesting for invertebrates, fungi etc.) and restoration of natural shrub and tree layer vegetation.

Personnel and budget:

The education and training activities have been continued and if possible intensified, leading to a change in the attitude of visitors in relation to nature. Therefore the number of well-trained (independent) nature guides and teachers at permanent or temporary basis must increase. Need for extended funding for personnel taking care of conservation and nature education by the government is still a major recommendation (the Natural Heritage Services of Metsähallitus, but also the Ministry of Education could increase efforts).

A proposal for additional LIFE funding has been forwarded to the EU.

An improvement of labour funding made it possible to open the Visitors centre during the whole year. The number of personnel has been more or less stable. At present there is a need of 2-3 permanent employees instead of seasonal people. One of them could focus on nature education. Fortunately at least 1-2 'permanent' and skilled seasonal workers are available.

Considering the excellent circumstances and great relevance of scientific investigations that could be carried out on forest management and peat land restoration, also the increase of funding for research merits a greater priority.

Detailed budgets are difficult to summarise, because some people is working for several protection areas. However it is clear that the National Park staff has made successful efforts to be financed for several aspects of education and nature management.

The level of basic budget from the Ministry of Environment is about 1,2 m Fim and has been quite stable during the diploma period, although the number and area of protection objects in the region has been increasing. An increase for the Park functions proper is recommended.

During the last 4 years some additional money for investments became available, partly because of the increased interest in the area as a result of the European Diploma:

-Kovero farmhouse and Kortosallo nature education estate: Fim 968.000 (1997-1999, Min. of Labour)

-Permanent exhibition renewal at Seitsemien visitor centre and maintenance of facilities (trails...): Fim 233.000 (1999-2000, EU)

-Additional money for customer/visitor service in visitor centre
Fim 200.000 and Fim 190.000 (1999 and 2000, Metsähallitus)

-Rehabilitation of drained peat lands in Seitsemien: Fim 700.000 (1996-1999, EU Life-fund)

Summarising conclusions:

a. The Seitsemien National Park offers a representative example of landforms, landscapes, forest types and peat lands typical for the southern boreal zone. Its contribution to biodiversity is of international significance, including a variety of both natural and semi-natural ecosystems.

b. recreation interests have been developed so far with respect to nature conservation values; expensive boardwalk trails are under consideration .

c. the well-equipped visitors centre and some annexes (Kovero, Korteso) offers good facilities for education, training and research and has been increasingly developed by organising several activities for different target groups, with financial input of Labour Ministry and Metsähallitus.

d. nature restoration of formerly drained peatlands is successfully continued .

e. the Finnish authorities decided to propose the National Parks as a Natura 2000 site; at this occasion the National Park Master Plan with future measures and actions could be reviewed.

f. the awarding of the European Diploma has significantly contributed to the development of several initiatives in the field of nature management, education and training; recreation has been carefully canalised in order to keep it in balance with biodiversity functions and values.

Most of the recommendations at the time of the award have been seriously taken into account.

g. the participation during the expertise of Dir. Dr. Rauno Vaisanen and the Director of the Finnish Environment Institute (dr. Heikki Toivonen) proved the great interest from central governmental bodies concerned.

h. although supplementary funding became available through several canals, a structural increase of budgets for staff functions is not yet reached at the appropriate level.

IV. Proposed recommendations

The renewal of the European Diploma could further stimulate and improve the National Park functions and values when taking into account following draft recommendations:

1. The staff of the Visitors Centre is to be reinforced with statutory nominations in order to cope with the growing needs for nature education, training and surveying;

2. The administrations of the Ministries of Environment and of Education are invited to agree on a specific programme with nomination of sufficient 'nature teachers' in order to respond the increased public interest and to further increase the environmental awareness of the visitors;

3. Increasing efforts in the field of ecological research are strongly recommended, making use of the excellent basic knowledge already available; special attention is needed regarding

- permanent plots for monitoring vegetation development after restoration (peat lands) or other nature management measures (grazing, mowing, forest rehabilitation) are essential in combination of fauna monitoring (both vertebrates and invertebrates)

- physical environment parameters (quality of natural environment) are to be monitored in a network of permanent plots

4. Co-operation between the National Park staff, FEI (Finnish Environmental Institute) and METLA (Forest Research Institute) is to be encouraged .

5. In the framework of the Natura 2000 designation, including new protected areas, strict reserves and the National Park itself, an integrated review of the Diploma area Master Plan is recommended. The further establishment of buffer zones with ecologically relevant restrictions in land use (forestry, recreation, hunting) is to be encouraged.

Final conclusion

The Seitsemien National Park represents outstanding values in terms of forest and peat land biodiversity, the presence of undisturbed landforms and of historic heritage landscapes with typical semi-natural vegetations. A remarkable balance has been reached between conservation, environmental education and outdoor recreation by the required nature management measures in the field. Considering also the increased efforts made by the managing staff of Seitsemien, supported by the moral value of the international recognition, we strongly recommend the renewal of the European Diploma.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

RESOLUTION (96) 29

ON THE AWARD OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA TO THE SEITSEMINEN NATIONAL PARK (FINLAND)

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 19 June 1996
at the 569th 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 noted the agreement of the Government of Finland;

After deliberation,

Solemnly awards the European Diploma, Category B, to the Seitsemien National Park in accordance with the Regulations for the European Diploma (Resolution (91) 16);

Places the aforesaid park under the patronage of the Council of Europe until 19 June 2001;

Attaches the following recommendations to the award:

1. the appointment of a leading person with full and specific responsibility for the park;
2. the setting aside of additional funds for:
 - employing more personnel for education, instruction, and training activities;
 - stepping up scientific research principally on biodiversity and biotope restoration;
3. continued efforts in the following fields:
 - rehabilitation trials of plantations on mineral soils;
 - maintaining oligotrophic lakes in their present state;
 - finding solutions, by the next renewal, for prohibiting fishing activity with a view to reducing ecological side effects and disturbances of vulnerable lake and peatland landscape;
 - monitoring the increase in pressure from tourists; guidance and wardening must be guaranteed.

**DRAFT RESOLUTION ON THE RENEWAL OF THE
EUROPEAN DIPLOMA TO THE
SEITSEMINEN NATIONAL PARK**

The Committee of Ministers, under 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 (96) 29 on the Award of the European Diploma to the Seitsemänen National Park;

Having regard to proposals of the Committee for the Activities of the Council of Europe in the field of Biological and Landscape Diversity (CO-DBP);

Bearing in mind the consultant's report submitted to the Group of Specialists for the European Diploma of Protected Areas at its meeting on 1 and 2 March 2001,

Renews the European Diploma to the Seitsemänen National Park until 19 June 2006;

Attaches the following recommendations to the renewal:

1. The staff of the Visitors Centre is to be reinforced with statutory nominations in order to cope with the growing needs for nature education, training and surveying;
2. The administrations of the Ministries of Environment and of Education are invited to agree on a specific programme with nomination of sufficient 'nature teachers' in order to respond to the increased public interest and to further increase the environmental awareness of the visitors;
3. Increasing efforts in the field of ecological research are strongly recommended, making use of the excellent basic knowledge already available; special attention is needed regarding
 - permanent plots for monitoring vegetation development after restoration (peat lands) or other nature management measures (grazing, mowing, forest rehabilitation) are essential in combination of fauna monitoring (both vertebrates and invertebrates)
 - physical environment parameters (quality of natural environment) are to be monitored in a network of permanent plots
4. Co-operation between the National Park staff, FEI (Finnish Environmental Institute) and METLA (Forest Research Institute) is to be encouraged.
5. In the framework of the Natura 2000 designation, including new protected areas, strict reserves and the National Park itself, an integrated review of the Diploma area Master Plan is recommended. The further establishment of buffer zones with ecologically relevant restrictions in land use (forestry, recreation, hunting) is to be encouraged.