

EUROPEAN DIPLOMA FOR PROTECTED AREAS

*AN AWARD FOR EXEMPLARY MANAGEMENT
OF OUTSTANDING EUROPEAN NATURAL HERITAGE*



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

EUROPEAN DIPLOMA FOR PROTECTED AREAS

French edition

Diplôme européen des espaces protégés

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Triglav National Park, Slovenia
Author: Aleš Zdešar



Matsalu National Park, Estonia
Author: Vaiko Noor

What is the European Diploma for Protected Areas?

Protected areas are one of the key elements of nature and landscape conservation.

■ All of the sites which hold the European Diploma for Protected Areas contribute to varying extents to preserving natural and landscape heritage and assisting member States to implement both the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention) and the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.

■ The European Diploma areas are of more than merely regional or national importance and have special significance for the protection, conservation and sustainable use of Europe's natural heritage. It was precisely to acknowledge the exceptional character of such areas that in 1965 the Council of Europe instituted the European Diploma. This award places landscapes, nature reserves, national parks and other protected areas of European importance under the Council of Europe's auspices.

■ In granting the European Diploma to a protected area, the Council of Europe is acknowledging its exceptional interest and the importance of protecting it. The decision is only taken after the site has been scrupulously assessed. The European Diploma for Protected Areas is awarded for five years in the first instance, after which it can be renewed for 10-year periods. All decisions are made by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, following independent assessment of candidate sites and the recommendation of a Group of Specialists.



Bieszczady National Park, Poland
Author: Grzegorz Lesniewskii



The Burren Region, Ireland
Author: www.burrenbeo.com

A Council of Europe award

■ Nature conservation has very wide implications. It encompasses the protection of natural and semi-natural areas and landscapes, the protection of flora and fauna, the sustainable management of all of these resources. This places responsibilities on all governments and communities to develop appropriate sectoral policies, provide education and make information available to everyone.

■ The Council of Europe is active in all these domains, particularly with regard to “its” Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats.

■ The Council of Europe decided to establish the European Diploma for Protected Areas as a mean of granting recognition to certain areas for the quality of their protection and conservation. This implies that there are measures to ensure the continuation of this protection in the long term and establishes methods to monitor the state of conservation. The European Diploma was instituted in 1965 in Resolution (65) 6 of the Committee of Ministers, while its regulations were most recently amended in 2008 by Resolution CM/ResDip(2008)1. In 2014, the model plan for annual reports was amended to focus on the

implementation of the conditions and/or recommendations attached to the award or the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas.

■ Although the conditions for the European Diploma’s award are strict, it can be applied to a wide variety of areas. It is only granted to natural or semi-natural areas or landscapes which are judged to have exceptional European interest, from the standpoint of conserving biological, geological or landscape diversity. A European Diploma for Protected Areas can be held by any of the Council of Europe’s member and non-member states. Appropriate protection systems, however, must be in place for the area’s scientific, cultural and aesthetic interest.

■ The nature of protection varies considerably between European Diploma areas. There are national parks established by countries’ highest authorities, regional parks answerable to local authorities, reserves run entirely by private associations and areas in which a mosaic of different forms of protection apply. In every case, however, the long-term conservation of natural features and landscapes must be guaranteed and managed accordingly in an exemplary manner.



Regional Park of Migliarino, San Rossore and Massaciuccoli, Italy
Author: Regional Park of Migliarino, San Rossore and Massaciuccoli



Ekenäs Archipelago National Park, Finland
Author: Ekenäs Archipelago National Park

Candidates for the European Diploma for Protected Areas

■ The procedure starts with the presentation of candidature by the government concerned. If a candidature is accepted, an independent appraisal is carried out. A “Group of Specialists”, appointed by the Council of Europe, then examines all the available information to ensure that the proposed site is of European interest and is properly protected. A management plan for the area is essential.

■ This examination is based on general criteria which all the candidate areas must satisfy. They are essentially concerned with areas’ European interest and the protective measures introduced. Specific criteria are also applied and vary according to the objectives assigned to the area, which can range from strict protection of biological diversity and natural ecosystems to conservation linked to the sustainable use of natural resources.

■ If the appraisal is positive, the Group of Specialists on the European Diploma for Protected Areas will declare in favour of the award of the European Diploma and will usually accompany this expression of support with a series of conditions and/or recommendations. The final decision on the award of a European Diploma for Protected Areas is taken by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and is contained in a resolution.

■ The European Diploma is awarded to the state concerned, which therefore enters into a formal commitment with the Council of Europe for the area’s conservation. The implementation of the conditions and/or recommendations will be monitored subsequently through the analysis of the annual reports and when the diploma is due for renewal.

■ Where the candidate area does not meet the standards required for the award of the European Diploma for Protected Areas, the Group of Specialists may suggest rejection of the candidature, or it may recommend that additional measures be required prior to re-consideration of the award of the diploma.

Renewals, reports and withdrawals

■ Decisions to renew European Diplomas are usually based on new on-the-spot visits, at which positive or negative changes in the situation are identified and respect for conditions and recommendations monitored.

■ In the event of a serious threat, an immediate expert appraisal may be ordered. This was, for example, the case in 1998 when the Doñana National Park (Spain) suffered serious pollution from an external source.



Poloniny National Park, Slovak Republic
Author: Miro Bural/Poloniny National Park



Central Balkan National Park, Bulgaria
Author: Angel Ispirev

■ Exceptional on-the-spot visits can also be decided by the Group of Specialists in case of possible threats. This was the case in 2021, for example, when an exceptional visit took place at the Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve (Germany). It aimed to identify solutions to regulate over-use by tourism and the river traffic on the Danube.

■ Every year, each protected area's manager must submit a report to the Council of Europe. These reports enable the Secretariat and the Group of Specialists to keep a regular check on how the situation is developing and how the recommendations and conditions (if any) attached to the resolutions awarding or renewing the European Diploma are being implemented.

■ Taken in conjunction with the Council of Europe's moral authority, the European Diploma for Protected Areas gives practical encouragement to the areas concerned to maintain a high level of protection. Although it is not a source of direct funding, it often makes it possible to secure greater political and financial support from governments, local authorities or other organisations. It often also helps managers to put up effective resistance to projects which are likely to undermine the diploma area's integrity.

■ In extreme cases, non-renewal of the diploma is the logical penalty for failure to respect the basic conditions originally attached to the European Diploma's award. In 50 years of its operation, the Council of Europe has had to take such a serious decision only once. This concerned the Pyrenees National Park (France), where totally inappropriate building developments – which had been explicitly excluded when the European Diploma was awarded – were undertaken.

■ In other cases, the European Diploma is not renewed until certain fundamental conditions are met. This is the case for the Scandola Nature Reserve (France) and for the Doñana National Park (Spain). The renewal of the European Diploma of these two areas is subject to the improvement of their protection.

■ The possibility of withdrawing the European Diploma has a significant, beneficial effect when an area's integrity is threatened. It can act as an incentive to reduce risks and to encourage improved management. This gives the European Diploma both its strength and its prestige. Losing the European Diploma has a considerable effect on public opinion.



Vanoise National Park, France
Author: Gotti Christophe/Parc national de la Vanoise



Gran Paradiso National Park, Italy
Author: Enzo Massa Micon/archivio PNGP

An active network of managers

Managing award-winning areas is a complex task which calls for exceptional qualities. Managers are responsible for ensuring that the landscape and natural values are maintained in the long term, without compromise. Yet at the same time, the needs and interests of both the local communities and the visitors must be taken into account. Constructive partnerships have to be developed with relevant stakeholders, such as the agricultural, forestry and tourist industries. The management of European Diploma areas is not just confined to the central core, but is now concerned with the sustainable development of entire regions.

Managers of European Diploma areas meet occasionally for major events. This gives them the opportunity to exchange information and experience, to discuss the problems facing

them and to forge co-operative links. In some instances, when two European Diploma areas form a geographically contiguous space across national borders, there is very close co-operation. This is particularly the case for the Vanoise National Park (France) and Gran Paradiso National Park (Italy), which have concluded a “twinning” agreement. Close co-operation also takes place at all levels between the Thayatal National Park (Austria) and the bordering Podyjí National Park (Czech Republic). This goes from contacts between the two directors to the exchange of experience and information between the staff of the parks. Moreover, with the agreement of both Germany and Luxembourg, a single European Diploma has been granted to the transfrontier areas of the Germano-Luxembourg Nature Park.

Future prospects

The Council of Europe is firmly committed to maintaining the high standards demanded by the European Diploma for Protected Areas. Preserving biological and landscape diversity is the main goal. Other goals, albeit often important, such as providing information to the public, encouraging environmental education, fostering social and economic interests or assisting sustainable development, must remain subordinate to that main goal.



Boschplaat Nature Reserve, Netherlands
Author: Boschplaat Nature Reserve

European Diploma areas will play an increasingly important role as models of innovatory practice in conserving and managing natural values, in the overall context of sustainable development. This also means responding positively to increasing public demands for nature and landscape conservation.

The 66 areas (in 2024), in a total of 27 countries, holding the European Diploma for Protected Areas have already made a significant contribution to both natural and historical heritage conservation in Europe. Gaps still remain and the countries that are not represented in the programme are strongly urged to nominate their most important protected areas to supplement this network of sites, which has been an outstanding model of protected areas and species, and of exemplarily managed conservation areas throughout Europe.



Wollmatinger Ried Untersee-Gnadensee Nature Reserve, Germany
Author: Tom Dove



Muddus National Park, Sweden
Author: Muttos National Park



Seitseminen National Park, Finland
Author: Kari Leo

The European Diploma areas

The areas that have received the Council of Europe's Diploma for Protected Areas represent practically every type of natural landscape in Europe. European Diploma areas therefore range from landscapes largely shaped and populated by human beings to strict nature reserves, in which the conservation of natural environments and species is an absolute priority.

The Nordic expanses

■ Muddus National Park (Sweden) is a vast area of practically virgin forest and marshland in Lapland. The animal life of the far north is well protected in this region, which is difficult for people to reach.

■ Seitseminen National Park (Finland) is a patchwork of peat bog and forest, part of which has been protected since the turn of the 20th century.

■ The Sarek and Padjelanta National Parks (Sweden) cover nearly 400 000 hectares and thus form an enormous protected area in a wild landscape of mountains and valleys, glaciers, tundra and heathland.

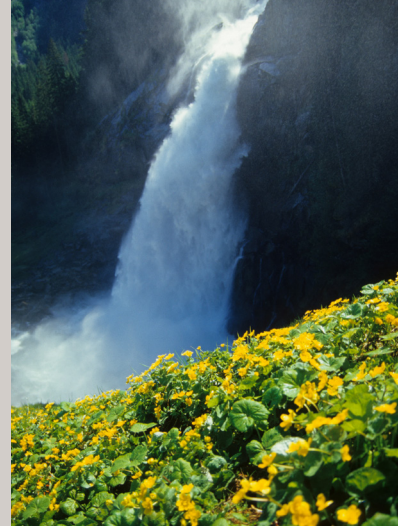
■ The upland parts of the Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve (United Kingdom) has some similarities with these vast Nordic expanses, although on a much smaller scale.



Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve, United Kingdom
Author: Michael B. Usher



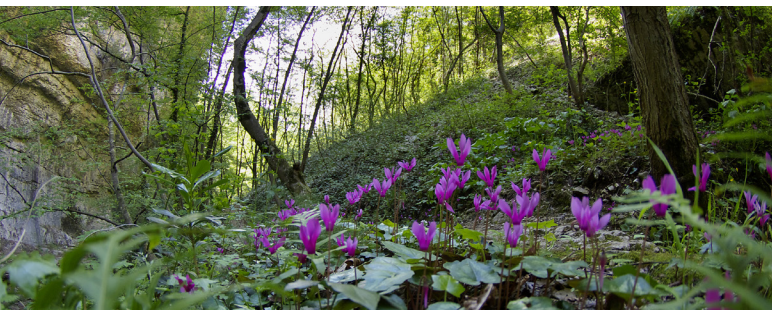
Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve, Germany
Author: Deifel



Krimml Falls Natural Site, Austria
Author: Rieder/Nationalpark Hohe Tauern

Practically unspoilt mountains, rivers, valleys and alluvial plains

■ The Podyjí National Park (Czech Republic) protects a river valley with outstanding features, with a rich variety of flora and exceptional pseudo-karstic caves. The Thayatal National Park (Austria) at the Austro-Czech border is one of the last nearly natural river-landscapes in central Europe with canyons, meanders and deep-cut valleys. The special geological and geomorphological conditions and its location at the border of two climatic zones create a very diversified configuration of species.



Gallipoli Cognato Regional Park
Author: Francesco Petruzzelli

■ With its 6 kilometres long gorge, the Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve (Germany) is one of the most impressive landscapes on the Danube.

■ The Krimml Falls Natural Site (Austria) preserves a landscape dominated by the highest falls in the Alps, with a total drop of 400 metres.

■ The Central Balkan National Park (Bulgaria) is one of the most valuable and largest protected areas in Europe. The park was established for the conservation of the unique nature of the Central Stara Planina mountains, as well as for the preservation of local culture and customs.

■ The Khosrov Forest Reserve (Armenia) is one the oldest protected areas in the world, dating back about 1 700 years. Founded in 334-338 by the order of Armenian King Khosrov Kotak, it initially served as grounds for royal hunting, military exercises and entertainment. The reserve preserves ancient cultural amenities, historical-architectural monuments, unique flora and fauna species and a splendid diversity of scenic landscapes.

■ The Regional Park Gallipoli Cognato (Italy) is characterised by the presence of a wide green scrubland made of variegated arboreal and shrub species, alternated with forest of centuries-old trees that reach huge size at high altitude.



Vashlovani Protected Areas

Author: Lasha Gigauri / Agency of Protected Areas

Virgin forests and evolving forests

■ The Bayerischer Wald National Park (Germany) is an enormous wooded upland area dominated by spruce forests, with a number of peat bogs. The Siebengebirge Nature Reserve (Germany) has a large area of wooded peaks in which beech forests predominate. There are also extensive beech forests in the Central Balkan National Park (Bulgaria).

■ The beech and oak forests, which are managed over an area of 764 hectares in the Sasso Fratino Nature Reserve (Italy), form an exceptional example of this kind of forest in western Europe.



Ipolytarnóc Protected Area,
Hungary

Author: Szarvas Imre

Geological, palaeontological and soil sites

■ The Ipolytarnóc Protected Area (Hungary) is a paleontological site of major importance. About 19 million years ago, it was the scene of a volcanic eruption which buried and protected trees and traces of leaves, as well as animals. It is also a green corridor for present-day flora and fauna.

■ The Karlštejn National Nature Reserve (Czech Republic), which lies south-east of Prague in a landscape of Bohemian karst, is an example of a protected environment close to a capital city, with exceptional qualities in terms of its geological, palaeontological and stratigraphic heritage and its wildlife heritage.

■ The Vashlovani Protected Areas (Georgia) are renowned for their remarkable geological and ecological diversity. The region hosts a striking semi-desert landscape that features an array of geological formations such as mud volcanoes, erosion valleys and sedimentary layers that are fossil rich.



Hautes Fagnes Nature Reserve, Belgium
Author: Annick Pironet

Heath, moorland and peatland

■ The Lüneburg Heath Nature Reserve (Germany) is a large, partially wooded area. The remaining areas of heathland are maintained by pasturing sheep belonging to a local breed (Heidschnucke). Beekeeping is a flourishing activity. The area receives millions of visitors, particularly when it is in flower.

■ The Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve (United Kingdom) includes high moorland and some of the last examples of the post-glacial pine stands of the Caledonian forest.

■ The Store Mosse National Park (Sweden) contains the largest peat bog in southern Sweden. It can be crossed on foot, thanks to nearly 40 kilometres of boardwalks.

■ The Hautes Fagnes Nature Reserve (Belgium) includes peat bogs, heathland and wet grasslands.

■ The Wurzacher Ried Nature Reserve (Germany) is a huge area of marsh and peat bog. Until recently, the peat was used by Bad Wurzach Spa for medicinal purposes.



Wurzacher Ried Nature Reserve, Germany
Author: Wurzacher Ried Nature Reserve



Camargue National Reserve, France
Author: Silke Befeld SNPN/RNN Camargue

Significant wetlands

■ The Camargue National Reserve (France), in the Rhone delta, is an important refuge for birds and contains the largest European colony of flamingos.

■ The Boschplaat Nature Reserve (Netherlands) offers protection to one third of the island of Terschelling, with its dunes and regularly flooded mudflats, to the benefit of large bird populations. Some 10% of the global population of Brent geese spend April and May there. Also in the Netherlands, the Weerribben-Wieden Nature Reserve is a wetland resulting from peat extraction. It offers a mixture of reed beds, open water, forests and meadows.

■ De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve (Netherlands) is a large area of marshland with a variety of landscapes, including reed beds, forests, pastures and stretches of open water.

■ The Doñana National Park (Spain), on the Mediterranean coast at the mouth of the Guadalquivir, is an exceptional natural site. Marshland, areas of open water, dunes, beaches and woodlands all make it a paradise – albeit one still under threat – for Mediterranean plant and animal life.



Kuşçenneti National Park, Türkiye
Author: Okan Arslangiray

■ The Kuşçenneti National Park (Türkiye), close to the Sea of Marmara, on the shore of the Kuş Lake at the mouth of the Sigirci River, is an important refuge and breeding ground for water birds. It is characterised by significant fluctuations in water level, which have an effect on its reed beds and neighbouring forests.

■ Minsmere Nature Reserve (United Kingdom), which is of artificial origin, is intensively and intelligently managed to increase its attraction for both birds and visitors.



Minsmere Nature Reserve, United Kingdom
Author: David Tipling



Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, Romania
Author: Daniel Petrescu

Islands, peninsulas and coastlines

On the shores of Lake Constance, the Wollmatinger Ried Untersee-Gnadensee Nature Reserve (Germany), with its marshlands and wet grasslands, has a large variety of water birds and plant species.

The Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve (Romania), one of the most extensive freshwater wetland areas still close to its natural state in Europe, is of exceptional biological, landscape and cultural value.

Matsalu National Park (Estonia) is one of the most important wetland bird areas in Europe, due to its prime position on the East Atlantic Flyway. The reserve includes Matsalu Bay, the delta of the Kasari River and the surrounding areas – floodplains, reed beds, coastal and wooded meadows and islets in Väinameri.

Naardermeer Nature Reserve (Netherlands) is an area of 1 200 hectares of fens near Amsterdam, with a natural shallow lake.

The Regional Park of Migliarino, San Rossore and Massaciuccoli (Italy), in an urban setting, protects a unique area of wetlands, lake and marshland, dunes and relict coastal forests where boreal and Mediterranean-type vegetation coexist.

The Maremma Regional Park (Italy) protects the last stretch of practically unspoilt coastline in Tuscany, as well as a fine selection of Mediterranean vegetation, including maquis and a variety of forests inhabited by typical forms of animal life. The Montecristo Island Nature Reserve, also in Italy, provides strict protection for typical Mediterranean ecosystems.

The Bullerö and Långviksskär Nature Reserves (Sweden) are made up of some 1 200 islands in the Stockholm archipelago. It is a favourite area for leisure sailing and discovering nature and demonstrates the continual change as the islands rise with isostatic rebound. The Ekenäs National Park (Finland) offers a unique example of Baltic islands and coastal waters.

The Fair Isle National Scenic Area (United Kingdom) is an isolated member of the Shetland Islands and is of great ornithological interest, some 230 bird species having been observed there. It is inhabited by a community which is about 70 strong. Purbeck Heritage Coast, also in the United Kingdom, covers about 40 kilometres of coastline, with high cliffs, dunes, islands, meadows, quarries and industrial and cultural sites and is of major Jurassic geological importance.



Desertas Nature Reserve, Portugal
Author: Rui Cunha



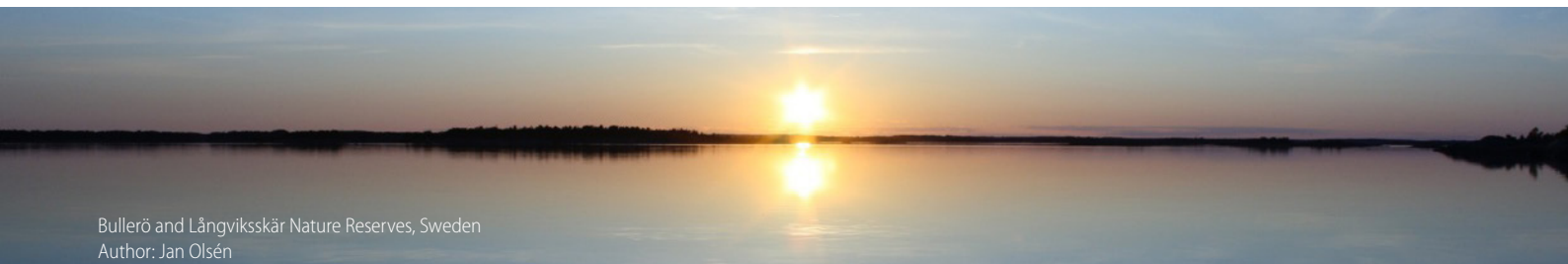
Cretan White Mountains National Park, Greece
Author: Joe Sultana

■ The Scandola Nature Reserve (France) in Corsica conserves the Mediterranean maquis, the cliffs, the rocky coastline and the marine ecosystem.

■ The Salvage Islands (Portugal) are of the greatest importance for the nesting of pelagian birds, as well as being of botanical interest. Desertas Nature Reserve, also in Portugal, harbours a large number of endemic, threatened and vulnerable species of flora and fauna and has unique and remarkable landscapes.

■ The Teide National Park (Spain), on the island of Tenerife, is characterised by an enormous volcanic cirque and mountains which rise to 3 700 metres, the highest in Spain. Its distinctive climate enables a particular range of vegetation to flourish, with a high proportion of endemic species.

■ The Cretan White Mountains National Park (Greece) protects the magnificent Samarian gorge on the island of Crete, which has extremely rich vegetation.



Bullerö and Långviksskär Nature Reserves, Sweden
Author: Jan Olsén



Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park, Italy
Author: Valentino Mastrella



Berchtesgaden National Park, Germany
Author: Berchtesgaden National Park

Central and southern European mountain landscapes

■ In the magnificent landscapes of the Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park (Italy), at the heart of the Apennines, large predators such as the wolf and the bear co-exist with the residents of the prosperous villages. Restoration reflects local architectural traditions and attracts many visitors.

■ The Maritime Alps Nature Park (Italy) and the Mercantour National Park (France) form the two sides of a single mountain region which is considered to be the most important centre of endemic species in the Alps.

■ In the eastern Carpathians, the Poloniny National Park (Slovak Republic) still contains numerous habitats of primary forests of beech and mixed beech and silver fir, as well as splendid architectural heritage. It is adjacent to both the Bieszczady National Park (Poland) and to one of the parts of the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve (Ukraine). The whole area is well-known for having central Europe's most extensive natural forests, as well as high-altitude grasslands. There are still primary stands of beech, with their associated populations of large mammals. In the western Carpathians, beech and silver fir forests are protected in the Dobročský National Nature Reserve (Slovak Republic).

■ In the White Carpathians, at the western tip of the mountain range, the Bílé Karpaty Protected Landscape Area (Czech Republic), which adjoins its counterpart in Slovak Republic, comprises a mosaic of habitats of natural and human origin, where the dominant element is grassland with a very wide variety of flora.



Dobročský National Nature Reserve, Slovak Republic
Author: Ivan Rybar



Retezat National Park, Romania
Author: Zoltan Nagy Gergely



Swiss National Park, Switzerland
Author: Hans Lozza/Swiss National Park

■ The Berchtesgaden National Park (Germany), located in a spectacular mountain setting, is managed to encourage forests to develop in a more natural way.

■ The Ordesa and Monte Perdido National Park (Spain) ranges from oak woodlands to high altitude grasslands, with intermediate areas of beech forest.

■ The Swiss National Park (Switzerland), which dates back to 1914, is located in a magnificent setting where the local species have the time to re-establish their natural cycles.

■ The Vanoise National Park (France) and Gran Paradiso National Park (Italy) with their numerous peaks of over 3 000 metres and their alpine pastures, inhabited by chamois and ibex, make up a large cross-border area.

■ The Triglav National park (Slovenia) is located in the Julian Alps, a characteristic limestone mountain massif. The most prominent landscape features include glacier-shaped valleys, mountain plateaus and mountains above the tree line (up to 2 864 metres). The park prides itself on its pure waters, deep-cut gorges, remains of virgin forests, and the richness of its biodiversity as well as on its cultivated landscapes and valley settlements.

■ Piatra Craiului National Park, the pearl of the Romanian Carpathians, is a wild and rocky landscape with a bold limestone ridge, vertical walls and deep canyons, and is a paradise for wild mountain flowers, chamois, large carnivores, climbers and local people living in a traditional way.

■ Retezat National Park, also in Romania, has spectacular landscape shaped by glaciers and an astonishingly rich flora and fauna where nature manifests itself unaffected by human intervention.



Ordesa and Monte Perdido National Park, Spain
Author: Ordesa and Monte Perdido National Park



Szénás Hills Protected Area, Hungary
Author: Sandor Biro

Cultivated or inhabited landscapes

■ The Germano-Luxembourg Nature Park (Germany/Luxembourg), a third of which is forest, includes grasslands with a large variety of species. It is set in a landscape which has undergone little change and has many natural and cultural features.

■ The Wachau Protected Landscape (Austria) extends over a 33 kilometre stretch of the Danube, which cuts through the Bohemian uplands and is bordered by forests, meadows, orchards and vineyards.

■ The Szénás Hills Protected Area (Hungary), in the immediate vicinity of Budapest, is home to numerous rare species. It is actively managed to encourage the restoration of its natural values.

■ The Peak District National Park (United Kingdom), situated in an area of mines and reservoirs, contains large tracts of pasture land, surrounded by dry stone walls and moorland. There is a rich cultural and archaeological heritage, with beautifully restored villages that attract large numbers of visitors.

■ The Tihany Peninsula (Hungary) is a beautiful pannonian landscape with extremely valuable volcanic and post-volcanic formations, with a unique diversity of fauna and flora as a result of the thousand-year-long interaction of nature and people.

■ The Burren Region (Ireland) is a unique place: 72 000 hectares of glaciated karst on Ireland's Atlantic coast which has been worked by farmers for over 6 000 years to create an extraordinary archaeological and ecological legacy which is today being actively conserved by the descendants of these same farmers.



© Vers József

Tihany Peninsula, Hungary
Author: József Vers



De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve, Netherlands
Author: De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve

European Diploma areas as models for conservation

Protecting Europe's heritage

European Diploma areas constitute a significant and representative sample of Europe's natural and semi-natural environments and also preserve a large proportion of the continent's animal and plant species. Several protected sites are located in areas that are strategically important for their species, particularly in the case of centres of endemic species and concentrations of species at the edge of their distribution. Other European Diploma areas are located on the routes taken by migratory species: they offer the latter essential refuges where they can rest and take nourishment before moving on.

European Diploma areas have developed numerous programmes for managing threatened species or reintroducing those that have disappeared locally. These areas also serve as reservoirs from which such species can be disseminated to other regions, such as the Vanoise National Park (France)

for the ibex and the Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park (Italy) for the chamois. An outstandingly successful example can be found in the Maremma Regional Park (Italy) where the reintroduction of the osprey from Corsica has brought the species back to the country after 40 years of absence. In 2011, a pair of ospreys nested in the Maremma area. In Austria, the wild cat was rediscovered a few years ago after being presumed to be extinct for more than 30 years. As a consequence, the Thayatal National Park (Austria) together with its European Diploma neighbour Podyji National Park (Czech Republic) developed a wild cat monitoring programme to identify the species through DNA analysis.



Sasso Fratino Integral Nature Reserve, Italy
Author: Pierre Hunkeler



Germano-Luxembourg Nature Park, Germany/Luxembourg
Author: Pierre Galland

Compatibility of uses and activities with conservation

■ The European Diploma areas have active management programmes. Thus, wild and domesticated herbivores play a part in maintaining grasslands, but in certain cases this has to be supplemented by careful cutting.

■ Diploma areas attract both professional and amateur researchers who have generally built up very comprehensive inventories, an essential contribution to furthering our knowledge of Europe's flora and fauna as a whole. These inventories, as well as providing information of the more popular species, such as birds, mammals and flowering plants, and their changing distribution, also cover less popular groups, such as insects, molluscs, lichens and fungi.

■ As refuges for animal life, protected areas allow species to develop and recolonise or increase the populations of neighbouring regions, for the benefit of tourists and, in the case of game species, hunters.

■ In most European Diploma areas, the conservation of landscapes, ecosystems and species means that human activities have to be compatible with the goals of protection. The European Diploma for Protected Areas is only ever awarded if the uses made of the area are consistent with the long-term preservation of the natural and landscape values. Precise recommendations are made and conditions laid down on this subject. Sustainability of the populations of plants and animals, and of the human use of the area, is seen to be absolutely essential. However, when these uses are in conflict, conservation must be the priority.

The sustainable use of European Diploma areas by people

■ With growing public interest in nature, the number of visitors to European Diploma areas is increasing. Managers need to be very careful to reconcile the protection of natural values with the pressures of ever-increasing numbers of



Maremma Regional Park, Italy
Author: Massimo Agostinelli



Store Mosse National Park, Sweden
Author: Martha Wageus

visitors. Reception facilities, information on how to behave in protected areas and education have become the principal means of maintaining this balance. Wardens are the main point of contact with visitors who visit in order to get away from their day-to-day environments and discover new horizons or an area of freedom. However, certain activities, such as sports, have to be carefully controlled. It should not be forgotten that many protected areas need tourists to fulfil their role of educating the public, to benefit the local economy and to reap the benefits of wide public support.

■ Fishing can be a contentious issue. However, several European Diploma areas authorise fishing. In the management of fishing, some places within a Diploma area can be specially designated and protected to enable the fish stock to breed.

■ Mining, quarrying and even oil drilling operations may be undertaken in quite exceptional cases connected with the particular status of the areas concerned, such as the Purbeck Heritage Coast (United Kingdom). Such operations are subject to very strict conditions, particularly regarding the precautions to be taken, compensation to be provided and restoration of any sites affected.

■ Farmers have traditionally shaped and maintained areas that are nowadays described as natural or semi-natural, such as grasslands and heathlands. These activities continue in certain protected areas, whilst efforts are made to ensure that agricultural practices remain very extensive and compatible with the long-term protection of the characteristic plant and animal life of the European Diploma area.

■ The most typical examples of livestock rearing are the horses and bulls in the Camargue National Reserve (France), the dairy cattle, which spend the summer on high alpine pastures of the Maremma Regional Park (Italy), and the reindeer in the large Nordic Diploma areas. The management of the flocks or herds, as well as the numbers of beasts, must take account of the sensitivity of the environment concerned. Moreover, livestock raisers must, where necessary, accept the presence of large predators such as the lynx, the wolf, the bear or the wolverine, which may attack their flocks. European Diploma areas in particular are developing approaches and methods aimed at facilitating this coexistence.



Bayerischer Wald National Park, Germany
Author: Andreas Ebert



Wachau Protected Landscape, Austria
Author: Franz Lechner

■ Certain European Diploma areas still contain practically virgin forests, which offer rare and valuable evidence of the natural life cycle of woodland ecosystems. In other areas it is possible to monitor or encourage the forest's development into a more natural entity. This process of change may sometimes be accompanied by careful felling, often to eliminate non-native tree species, as at Podyjí National Park (Czech Republic). However, some felling occurs for traditional timber uses, such as craft activities or fencing as well as heating and construction.

■ Products from many of these areas are considered to be of high interest. They are perfectly adapted to the European Diploma areas' requirements and can benefit from a label which confirms their quality and the conditions of production, thus making them more marketable.

Education, research and well-being

■ Nearly all the European Diploma areas place great emphasis on informing and educating the public, research and encouraging informal leisure activities.

■ Information centres, nature trails, routes with explanatory sign-posting, attractive publications and the provision of wardens and guides are all ways of helping visitors to appreciate, understand and respect nature and the landscape. However, visitors who are seeking a break from the normal routine and just want to recharge their batteries also have the opportunity to immerse themselves in an atmosphere of calm and beauty, without feeling obliged to know the names of the animals and plants that they can admire.

■ Educational programmes for children are often particularly well developed. It is important for the next generation to learn about their environment and to know why and how it needs to be cared for. The people with disabilities are not forgotten, with the provision of such facilities as special means of access, transport suited to mountain paths, such as in the Vanoise National Park (France), and discovery trails based on the sense of touch.

■ In the Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park (Italy), each village has drawn up programmes and exhibitions that highlight animals or plants of symbolic significance, such as the bear, the wolf, the chamois or particular insects or flowers.



Fair Isle National Scenic Area, United Kingdom
Author: Alexander Bennett



Doñana National Park, Spain
Author: Michael B. Usher

Research is a key aspect of numerous European Diploma areas. This applies particularly to nature reserves in eastern Europe, where there has been a tradition of detailed research programmes since the creation of such protected areas, often dating back to the 1930s. The detailed findings are systematically recorded each year, thus providing reference data over a very long period. In some Diploma areas there are research stations, as in the Doñana National Park (Spain), and even a bird observatory on the Fair Isle National Scenic Area (United Kingdom).

Researchers everywhere are interested in working in areas that are protected from serious threats, while those responsible for managing such areas are always in need of solid scientific data to carry out their management activities in an optimum fashion.

Protected areas, particularly those holding the European Diploma, constitute reference sites which are essential for understanding how natural or modified ecosystems function. They also assist in exploring finding better ways of managing natural resources and sharing good practices.

Model areas for nature conservation and encouraging sustainable development

European Diploma areas are particularly noteworthy from the standpoint of landscape and nature. They enjoy a legal status which enables them to prevent, or at least considerably limit, dangerous or damaging practices. They encourage the best possible conservation of natural and landscape values. They are managed by clearly defined organisations and generally enjoy scientific and technical support. Local authorities and inhabitants are usually represented on the Diploma areas' governing bodies; this permits a fruitful dialogue about the manner in which the areas and human activities should be managed and integrated. The conditions are therefore very favourable for making European Diploma areas models for the conservation of natural resources and sustainable development.

In the tourism field, for example, many areas have drawn up coherent programmes with representatives of the tourist industry. Compatibility between tourism and conservation reflects local partnerships concerning such matters as accommodation, transport, paths and tracks for walkers and cyclists, and environment-friendly management methods.



Siebengebirge Nature Reserve, Germany
Author: VVS - archive



Peak District National Park, United Kingdom
Author: Peak District National Park Authority

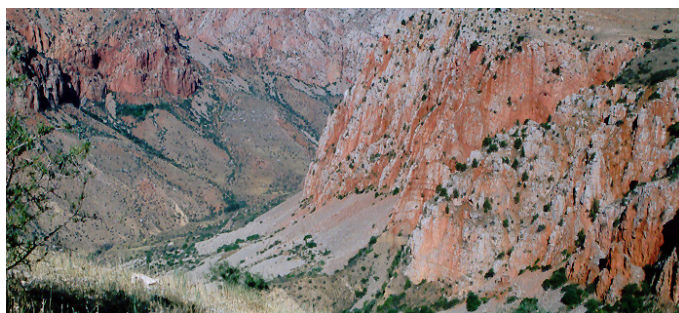
Several parks have developed useful activities concerned with preserving the built heritage. They provide publications and advice on local architectural techniques and values. They can encourage restoration and new building which is in harmony with the region's heritage. Some give financial aid or other assistance to support the use of these techniques and the maintenance of local craft skills.

Certain heavily inhabited and/or visited areas face major traffic problems and are thus driven to seek imaginative and effective solutions. The Peak District National Park (United

Kingdom) has developed traffic management and area plans which strongly encourage public transport. It carefully manages and supervises parking areas and transit traffic through the park.

Visitor numbers, which are sometimes excessive, force officials to play close attention to the places visited, to ensure that sensitive environments and species are not put at risk. At the Lüneburg Heath Nature Reserve (Germany) visitors are channelled along carefully chosen corridors to ensure that as many visitors as possible are concentrated on about 5% of all the available paths. The policy is to facilitate and encourage access to a limited number of typical habitats – peat bog, heath and rivers – thus enabling other sites to remain undisturbed.

However, it is not easy to respond to everyone and to know when maximum capacity has been reached. This capacity is very difficult to determine and only becomes evident once it has clearly been exceeded. The only suitable response is careful management, which anticipates well in advance the effects of sudden and significant, and sometimes irreversible, increases in damaging practices on plant life and animal populations. The sharing of information amongst the Diploma areas' managers is critical in understanding how the balance between nature and people can be effectively managed.



Khosrov Forest Reserve, Armenia
Author: A. Malkhasyan



Thayatal National Park, Austria
Author: D. Manhart



Sarek and Padjelanta National Parks, Sweden
Author: Sarek and Badjelánnda National Parks

European Diploma areas also offer good examples of subdivisions into areas with different objectives and regulations. The Maremma Regional Park (Italy), for example, includes fully protected areas, areas which are protected but where limited exploitation of resources is allowed, and a social and economic development area where the park facilities are located and a more intensive form of agriculture is authorised. There is also a peripheral area earmarked for environmental protection and the preservation of the natural values, where economic and other activities must be compatible with the park's objectives. Thayatal National Park (Austria) has established "quiet zones" which people are encouraged not to enter so that the wildlife is not disturbed.

With a clearly understood zoning policy, a Diploma area can become the centre of an original strategy capable of transforming a marginal and poor region into one which is prosperous and dynamic, as in the case of the Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park (Italy).

The influence of European Diploma areas can be expected to extend well beyond their boundaries. Nature will not survive if it is confined simply to protected areas. Reserves are essential as refuges, bases for operations and areas where nature and landscape protection take precedence over other interests and land uses. However, it is essential for nature protection and a consideration for biodiversity to be taken into account throughout every region and integrated as closely as possible into human activities.

The search for innovative approaches forms part of managers' regular work. For example, in Sweden's Sarek, Padjelanta and Muddus National Parks, a detailed study has been carried on the ecology of large predatory mammals, which has formed the basis for a new system of compensation for livestock killed by carnivores, and should reduce conflicts with the Samis and encourage them not to hunt and kill predators. The system involves compensating livestock farmers according to the number of predators, such as lynx and wolverine, present on their land. The system offers more incentives and is easier to apply than the one based on an examination of the carcasses of the domestic animals which have been killed.



Piatra Craiului National Park, Romania
Author: Piatra Craiului National Park

■ The European Diploma for Protected Areas could also contribute to the preservation of cultural landscapes. In 2011 the administration of the Piatra Craiului National Park (Romania) awarded a contract to the Bucharest Architecture High School to produce technical guidelines aiming to integrate the architectural characteristics of the region in the construction and renovation of buildings. The park is located in a region where architectural features and traditions are very specific and this project is an excellent example of what can be done to combine the protection of the cultural heritage with the preservation of the natural habitat and landscapes.

Involving local partners

■ Clearly, European Diploma areas cannot be islands of nature kept in isolation, but they all involve local inhabitants and visitors.

■ Many systems have been established to enable individuals, authorities and interested groups to express their views in the institutional and management structures of European Diploma areas. This ranges from advisory or decision-making councils, in which the various interests are fairly represented, to managers' day-to-day relations with all the governments, local authorities, people and groups concerned.

■ For example, the Purbeck Heritage Coast (United Kingdom) has an ad hoc committee that brings together local authorities, owners, nature conservation and geological organisations and other bodies as part of the area's integrated management. The aim is to ensure that, far from becoming a quasi-museum, the Purbeck Coast continues to seek strategies to ensure its dynamic development, while retaining all the qualities of its landscape and nature.



Selvagens Islands Nature Reserve, Portugal
Author: Paulo Henrique Silva



Purbeck Heritage Coast, United Kingdom
Author: Tony Gill



Naardermeer Nature Reserve, Netherlands
Author: Gradus Lemmen

■ The fact remains, however, that local communities may see their usage rights restricted by protective provisions. Nevertheless, in the long term it is often very constructive to demonstrate that local people can reap benefits other than those derived from the direct use of resources. This can convince people to adopt the protection of the site both for their own interests as well as for those of future generations.

■ In 2014, the Maremma Regional Park (Italy) launched the “Maremma Park” trademark with the purpose of increasing the value of the area through the promotion of sustainable economy and tourism. The park gives the use of its trademark only to the farms which are or do their activities inside the territory of the protected area.

■ The positive influence of European Diploma areas extends well beyond the protected zone. Neighbouring villages often seek information and advice from an area’s managers, as well as support for and proposals concerning sustainable economic development that respects their natural resources.



Réserve naturelle de De Weerribben-Wieden, Pays-Bas
Author: Ronald Messemaker



Mercantour National Park, France
Author: Philippe Richaud/PNM

The contribution of the European Diploma for Protected Areas to European ecological coherence

The European Diploma for Protected Areas must retain its distinctive characteristics and its special monitoring and appraisal mechanisms. At the same time, it must develop mutually productive relationships and collaboration with other networks of protected areas.

■ The areas of productive co-operation relating to the European Diploma include:

- ▶ the activities of the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and its protected areas committee;
- ▶ UNESCO's World Heritage sites;
- ▶ the Ramsar sites designated by the member States of the Ramsar Convention for their exceptional value as wetlands;
- ▶ sites nominated by the European Union member States as part of the Natura 2000 programme;
- ▶ sites nominated under the Bern Convention as part of the Emerald Network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest.

■ Regular and constructive relations have also been established with organisations such as the EUROPARC Federation, to which many managers of European protected areas belong.

■ Finally, reference should be made to co-operation between individual protected areas. Encouragement for cross-border activities is an area where the Council of Europe and European Diploma sites have an exceptional role to play. An example would be the cross border co-operation between Podyjí National Park (Czech Republic) and Thayatal National Park (Austria). Other examples are the close collaboration between the French Mercantour National Park and the Italian Maritime Alps Nature Park. Co-operation can even materialise in a twinning relationship, as is the case for the Gran Paradiso National Park (Italy) and the Vanoise National Park (France), or in a single European Diploma granted to the transfrontier areas of the Germano-Luxembourg Nature Park.

Glossary

Alluvial plain

Plain formed by the deposit of alluvium (sediments) carried by floodwater.

Bern Convention

Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats adopted in Bern on 19 September 1979, which came into force on 1 June 1982.

Biological diversity

The variety of living species in the biosphere, including genetic diversity, the variety of species, and the habitats in which the species live.

Biosphere

All of the planet's ecosystems, including all living beings and their habitats.

Centre of endemic species

Biogeographical region where large numbers of endemic species are found.

Chernozem

Soil typical of steppes (central Europe, North America) with a continental climate (harsh winters, hot and dry summers). This very black soil contains large amounts of organic matter, making it very fertile.

Ecosystem

An ecological system defined by the living beings (biocenosis), the physical and chemical parameters (biotope) and the many kinds of interaction between these factors.

Endemic species

A living species found only in a particular territory.

Habitat

Area in which an animal or plant species lives.

Isostatic rebound

Land which was pushed down into the Earth's crust by the weight of ice during the last glaciation, and is still rising after the pressure was released with the melting of the ice.

Karst

Rough limestone country with underground drainage.

Landscape

An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.

Mudflat

A muddy stretch of land, especially near a river mouth, submerged at high water.

Peat bog

Environment of greater or lesser acidity, comprising peat and characteristic of wetlands, colonised by low-growing vegetation.

Reed bed

Area alongside a stretch of water where reeds grow.

Sustainable development

A "sustainable development" policy ensures the durability of natural resources (water, air, soil and biological diversity) by incorporating environmental protection into other policies, with the aim not to jeopardise the ability of future generations to foster their own economic development.

"Twinning" agreement

The Gran Paradiso National Park (Italy) and the Vanoise National Park (France) have "twinning" their European Diplomas as a mean to strengthen their co-operation in the field of biodiversity and landscape conservation.

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List of European Diploma areas

Armenia

2013: Khosrov Forest Reserve

Austria

1967: Krimml Falls Natural Site

1994: Wachau Protected Landscape

2003: Thayatal National Park

Belgium

1966: Hautes Fagnes Nature Reserve

Bulgaria

2009: Central Balkan National Park

Czech Republic

2000: Bílé Karpaty Protected Landscape Area

2000: Karlštejn National Nature Reserve

2000: Podyjí National Park

Estonia

2003: Matsalu National Park

Finland

1996: Seitsemien National Park

1996: Ekenäs Archipelago National Park

France

1966: Camargue National Reserve

1976: Vanoise National Park¹

1985: Scandola Nature Reserve

1993: Mercantour National Park

Georgia

2015: Vashlovani Protected Areas

Germany

1967: Lüneburg Heath Nature Reserve

1968: Wollmatinger Ried Untersee-Gnadensee Nature Reserve

1971: Siebengebirge Nature Reserve

1973: Germano-Luxembourg Nature Park

1978: Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve

1986: Bayerischer Wald National Park

1989: Wurzacher Ried Nature Reserve

1990: Berchtesgaden National Park

Greece

1979: Cretan White Mountains National Park

Hungary

1995: Ipolytarnóc Protected Area

1995: Szénás Hills Protected Area

2003: Tihany Peninsula

1. Gran Paradiso National Park (Italy) and Vanoise National Park (France), consider their European Diplomas as “twinned” diplomas.

Ireland

2013: The Burren Region

Italy

1967: Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park

1985: Sasso Fratino Integral Nature Reserve

1988: Montecristo Island Nature Reserve

1992: Maremma Regional Park

1993: Maritime Alps Nature Park

2005: Regional Park of Migliarino, San Rossore and Massaciuccoli

2006: Gran Paradiso National Park²

2020: Regional Park Gallipoli Cognato

Luxembourg

1973: Germano-Luxembourg Nature Park

Netherlands

1970: Boschplaat Nature Reserve

1995: Weerribben-Wieden Nature Reserve

1999: De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve

2004: Naardermeer Nature Reserve

Poland

1998: Bieszczady National Park

Portugal

1992: Salvage Islands Nature Reserve

2014: Desertas Nature Reserve

Romania

2000: Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve

2006: Piatra Craiului National Park

2008: Retezat National Park

Slovak Republic

1998: Poloniny National Park

1998: Dobročský National Nature Reserve

Slovenia

2004: Triglav National Park

Spain

1985: Doñana National Park

1988: Ordesa and Monte Perdido National Park

1989: Teide National Park

Sweden

1967: Muddus National Park

1967: Sarek and Padjelanta National Parks

1988: Store Mosse National Park

1988: Bullerö and Långviksskär Nature Reserves

Switzerland

1967: Swiss National Park

Türkiye

1976: Kuşçenneti National Park

Ukraine

1997: Carpathian Biosphere Reserve

United Kingdom

1966: Peak District National Park

1979: Minsmere Nature Reserve

1983: Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve

1984: Purbeck Heritage Coast

1985: Fair Isle National Scenic Area

2. Gran Paradiso National Park (Italy) and Vanoise National Park (France), consider their European Diplomas as “twinned” diplomas.

The European Diploma for Protected Areas is a prestigious international award granted since 1965 by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. It recognises natural and semi-natural areas and landscapes of exceptional European importance for the preservation of biological, geological and landscape diversity and which are managed in an exemplary way. Protected areas may receive the diploma for their outstanding scientific, cultural or aesthetic qualities, but they must also be the subject of a suitable conservation scheme



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