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AND NATURAL HABITATS

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REPORT

**ON THE SPOT EXPERT APPRAISAL OF THE
BERCHTESGADEN NATIONAL PARK**

(GERMANY)

21-23 October 2019

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1. Preface

The on-the-spot appraisal of Berchtesgaden National Park was carried out for the first time since 2010. The visit took place between 21 and 23 October 2019. The site was awarded the European Diploma in 1990 and it was regularly renewed since then. The latest renewal of the Diploma to Berchtesgaden National Park has been granted until 18 June 2020 (Resolution 7, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 16 September 2010).

2. Available documents

Official documents on the European Diploma include the on-the-spot appraisal reports 2000¹ and 2010², the resolution on the renewal of 2010³ and the annual reports for the years 2017 and 2018. Further documents can be found on the Council of Europe website.⁴ The management plan was adopted in 2001 for the period 2001-2010 and has not been updated since.

3. Site description

The Berchtesgaden National Park is located in the southeast of Bavaria at the Austrian border, which encloses the National Park except to the north. It is a valuable advantage that the adjoining areas on the Austrian side of the border are mostly designated either as nature reserve or nature park. The territory of the park is owned by the State of Bavaria.

The Berchtesgaden National Park covers nearly 210 sqkm (20,808 hectares). Founded in 1978, it was the second German national park and still is the only alpine national park in Germany, recognised as IUCN category II National Park. One of the highest German peaks, the Watzmann (2,713 m) is a landmark of the National Park, as is the lake Königssee. The east face of the Watzmann with a height of 1,800 m is the highest mountain face in the eastern Alps. Altogether, the vertical gradient between the bottom of the Königssee and the Watzmann peak is 2,300 m. The Park is visited by more than 1.6 mio. tourists per year, though the majority is attracted by the romantic scenery of the Königssee, located mostly inside the park.

Geologically, the National Park belongs to the northern limestone Alps. About 44% of the area are forests, 21% alpine grassland, 19% rocks and morainal plains, 12% mountain pine and green alder shrubs and 3% water and glaciers. On more than 30 pastures in the Park local farmers have the vested right to feed their cattle during summer.

Compared to the figures shown in the 2010 report, the zonation of the Park has been changed. The former “temporary managed zone” is now included in the core zone (no intervention zone), which covers 75% of the total area. The permanently managed zone is 25%. The National Park is also designated as Natura 2000 area and part of the greater UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Berchtesgadner Land under MaB criteria. The latter covers about 83,900 ha. The core area of the Biosphere Reserve covers the total area of the National Park.

The climate can be classified as mountain climate with a remarkable difference of nearly 10° C in the annual average temperature between the lake Königssee and the peak of the Watzmann. Due to the barrier effect of the mountains, the climate is characterised by a high vertical variability. The precipitation ranges from 1,500 mm in the valleys to 2,600 mm on the mountains. The average snow cover can reach over 3 m on the heights. According to the Park management, the precipitation has not changed significantly with the ongoing global warming.

The lake Königssee is the most visited place in the National Park. The lake itself covers 529 ha, of which 521 ha are within the Park’s boundaries. All other lakes are smaller than five hectares, except for the Obersee (57 ha). The Klausbach, the Wimbach, the Eisbach, the Schreinbach and the Saletbach are the main water courses in the Park.

¹ Report PE-S-DE(2000)66

² Report PE-S-DE(2010)9

³ CM/ResDip(2010)7

⁴ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/bern-convention/-/berchtesgaden-national-park>

Habitats and species

Fauna

Fauna in the National Park is typical for the northern Alps, including rare species, both lowland and alpine. Nevertheless, further scientific research is needed, e.g. on insects, snails and butterflies. More than 50 mammal species, 100 breeding and about 40 migrating bird and 15 fish species are recorded. Ibex (*Capra ibex*) was eradicated, then reintroduced. Large carnivores like the wolf, bear and lynx became extinct in the mid-19th century and so far could not build up a permanent population again. European otter (*Lutra lutra*) disappeared about 100 years ago and has recently resettled again.

Changes in the land use and human activities, first of all intense forestry since the early 16th century, and grazing pastures as well as a different tree composition influenced the population of various species in both ways, increasing and decreasing.

High numbers of chamois, roe deer and red deer require game regulation, which in principle is hardly compatible with the National Park's objectives. The main reason for a red deer overpopulation is the absence of predators. The park administration provides food for red deer in winter, as well as enclosures to reduce browsing and bark stripping damage. Traditionally, red deer moved to lower areas in winter. However, this tradition was already interrupted more than 100 years ago, when the total area was fenced as a court hunting ground. Since then, the former wintering areas are occupied by human settlements and associated forms of land use.

Vegetation

Due to the significant height difference, the National Park includes typical plant communities of different altitudes with distinctions between the southern (sunny) and the northern (shadowy) slopes. Only in small and inaccessible areas, the forest remained in a natural state, but was significantly changed on the vast majority of sites.

Up to 700 m, beech and mixed beech forests dominate. Up to 1,400 m, a mixed mountain forest can be found with an increasing proportion of spruce. The economical use of the forest led to a higher proportion of spruce and larch. Above 1,400 m, mountain pine, green alder and alpine meadows dominate. There is no permanent nival zone. Alluvial forests and peat bogs are rare and small.

4. Appraisal

4.1 European interest

Berchtesgaden National Park is the only alpine national park in Germany. Together with the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, an important area is either protected or designated for sustainable use. The designation as Natura 2000 site confirms its European importance. As the adjoining area on the Austrian side is designated as nature reserve, the protected areas in a wider region are of remarkable size. In 2011, the XI Alpine Conference nominated this alliance of the protected areas „Berchtesgaden-Salzburg“ as a pilot region for the ecological Alpine network. The transboundary cooperation between protected areas is an important aspect and is shown in various projects, such as cross-border hiking events or common design of information points in the border area.

4.2 Conservation measures

Legal protection

The legal base for the Berchtesgaden National Park is the 1987 ordinance, which defines the park boundaries and the tasks of the park administration, which is directly subordinated to the responsible ministry for Environment. The Park is financed by the State of Bavaria and through project funds, e.g. EU funds.

Boundaries, zoning, buffer zones

More than 2/3 of the site's boundaries are formed by the German/Austrian state border and it is important to note that most of the adjoining areas on the Austrian side are protected either as nature reserve or as Nature Park Weißbach.

The core zone of the National Park covers 15,600 ha, the management or preservation zone stretches over 5,200 ha, of which about 80% are forests. In the management zone, there are also pastures and touristic areas like the hamlet of Sankt Bartholomä. One third or 1,260 ha of the management zone is defined as zone for bark beetle control. Officially, there is no defined buffer zone surrounding the park, but primarily the Austrian protected areas, and also the biosphere reserve, function as a buffer for the National Park.

Supervision and warding

The park administration is located in Berchtesgaden. Several outposts function as information centres and staging posts for rangers and other personnel. The number of staff has been slightly increasing over the years, but the administration is asking for more staff in the visitors' centre as promised at the opening of the centre.

State of conservation

In general, the state of conservation is good. Although an updated management plan is missing, the efforts made to protect habitats and species are satisfactory, including a fair cooperation with local interested groups. A big step forward was made with the consolidation of the core zone and the temporary management zone in 2014, which enlarged the non-intervention zone significantly up to nowadays 75%.

Land use

Noteworthy forms of land use in the Park are the pastures and touristic spots like the Königssee with the village of Sankt Bartholomä. Forestry in the National Park is not aiming to raise income but to manage bark beetle and guarantee the safety of roads and hiking routes.

4.3 Management

Management plan

The management plan is the weakest topic related to management. Although the administration is obliged to provide a management plan, the current document was elaborated in 2000 for the period 2001–2010. For nearly ten years, the Park has been managed only on the basis of annual working plans and follow-ups of the 2001-2010 management plan. A new management plan is in preparation and should be ready for approval by the Bavarian Government by mid-2020. No management plan exists for the Natura 2000 site of community interest, according to the Natura 2000 Standard Data Form (status March 2019). The Natura 2000 management plan is currently under preparation and should also be completed by mid-2020.

Capacities and financial resources and budget

Considering the opening of the visitors' centre "Haus der Berge" in 2013, the human resources are on a minimum level. Although agreed, the staff in the visitors' centre never reached the number needed to run the centre efficiently. The budget for the Berchtesgaden National Park is provided by the State of Bavaria. The figures show a slight fluctuation. The average annual increase between 2005 and 2019 is about three percent. The running costs for the visitors' centre "Haus der Berge" (*House of the Mountains*), opened in 2013, are included in the budget.⁵

⁵ In comparison, the Bayerischer Wald National Park, which is slightly larger but situated in a low mountain range, has about 200 employees (some of them part-time) and an annual budget from the State of Bavaria of approx. 23 Mio € (project funds not included).

Year	Budget in Mio. €	Personal (plan)
2005	5.327,9	60
2010	7.721,5	64
2015	6.816,2	72
2019	8.212,1	74

Research and monitoring programmes

Scientific research in the Berchtesgaden National Park is aiming to provide sufficient information for the further management and for evaluation and performance control of various measures. A specific cooperation exists between the Technical University Munich, the National Park and the Biosphere Region Berchtesgadner Land, to investigate the alpine ecosystems. A professorship for Ecosystem dynamics and Forest management in Mountain landscapes has been established. The cooperation is co-financed by the Bavarian Ministry for the Environment.

Relationship between the body responsible for the area and the other stakeholders (local elected representatives, socio-economic actors, NGOs)

To secure information and cooperation with various interest groups like agriculture, fishery or economy, as well as NGOs, an advisory board with about 40 member organisations has been established under the chairmanship of the minister for environment. This board meets at least once a year or on demand. To improve cooperation with the communities, a communal board was founded under the chairmanship of the Landrat (head of the district authority).

Some NGOs seem to be very active and participate not only in the board, but also through interventions at various levels, including court cases.

Public services, including waste management and use of renewable energy systems

The national park region is an attractive tourist destination with more than 1.6 mio. visitors a year. Although Berchtesgaden is accessible by train, most tourists arrive by car or bus. The main attraction for day tourists is the lake Königssee with St. Bartholomä, a hamlet with a famous baroque pilgrims' chapel. Sankt Bartholomä can only be accessed by boat or on foot on long mountain hikes. The excursion boats operate with electric power since 1910. In summer, a bus service runs between Berchtesgaden and the Austrian Nature Park Weißbach.

The National Park has no waste management inside the park, visitors are asked to take their litter with them on their hikes. Several mountain huts have their own energy supply, mainly from generators, and their own waste treatment. Plans to build water and waste water pipes are opposed by the park administration. This includes a project of a waste water pipe from the Watzmannhaus (*Watzmann mountain hut*). Other waste water treatments from alpine cabins are under discussion, but should be built into existing forest roads.

4.4 Uses and socio-economic activities

Uses and socio-economic activities are alpine farming (pastures) and tourism, which do not have strong impacts on the environment. Within the Park, a state police forces training centre exists, which can only be accessed over a long distance via mountain roads. Although this training centre is undisputed, it may be considered to limit the size to what is definitely needed for field training and move the administration outside the National Park. An army training compound is established close to the National Park.

Grazing

A number of forest pastures have been replaced by light pastures. Light pastures are smaller and former 250 ha forest pastures have the same capacity than 30 ha light plus nine ha forest pastures. Farmers, who have changed to the new system are pleased, but nevertheless there is still a number of farmers keeping to the old system. With climate change, the driving of cattle to the pastures starts earlier. New grazing regulations allow for a higher number and concede a wider timeframe for stocking.

Hunting and fishing

Although no hunting is allowed in the National Park, game regulation is necessary in the management zone. At the lake Königssee, there is only one license for economic fishery. Fish stocking and taking are carefully reported. Fish stock originates from local breeds. The population of lake trout (*Salmo trutta lacustris*) is decreasing for undiscovered reasons.

Tourism / leisure activities

As mentioned, the lake Königssee is the first place to be visited in the National Park. The park administration intends to start a project on visitors steering to achieve a more equitable distribution of hikers, which would be beneficial to the Park and the operators.

Mountaineering, hiking and climbing are also important for the local economy. A network of marked hiking trails and climbing routes of different levels of difficulty is provided and free climbing is possible, but can cause threats to the fauna. In fact, some alpine cabins and mountain huts are more frequented than others. The Park administration intends to promote the less visited places.

In 2015 the community Ramsau near Berchtesgaden became the first village in Germany to be designated as Mountaineering village (*Bergsteigerdorf*), supported by the German Alpine Club (DAV)⁶. Communities within this programme commit themselves to actively foster nature-friendly and sustainable tourism.

Next to the park boundaries, but outside the protected area, the Jenner cable car is an attractive means of transport to go up to a view point. The old cable car was replaced in 2019 by a new one with a higher capacity of maximum 1,600 passengers per hour instead of 460. Around 70% of the passengers are summer guests. A spotlight marks the mountain station in the night and might cause light pollution and does not seem to be necessary.

Awareness-raising information/education resources and activities

Beside the main visitors' centre, the Berchtesgaden National Park provides information at various information points in different locations, mainly entrance routes to the Park. A wide range of information material is available and guided tours are offered. Educational programmes for children can be booked indoors as well as outdoors and are very popular. Nevertheless, the European Diploma logo is not used frequently except with the award certificate, which is displayed in the office building with little publicity.

Human occupation and cultural heritage

Beside the small settlement of Sankt Bartholomä at Lake Königssee, there are no villages in the Park.

As there are easier routes across the mountains, human occupation of the area started rather late in 1102 by the foundation of a provost by Augustinian monks and became intense only with intensive salt mining⁷ in the 16th century and a growing demand for firewood and stingers for the salt mines. The Sankt Bartholomä chapel also goes back to this time but was revamped in baroque style in the 17th century.

⁶ This international initiative is driven by the Alpine Clubs in Austria, Germany, Italy and Slovenia as well as by Allparc and supported with EU funds

⁷ In fact salt mining goes back to Roman times

Buildings and infrastructure

A specific location within the Park is the police training centre, which will be enlarged according to unconfirmed information. As this centre causes traffic as well as other disturbances like noise and light, it may be worth reviewing its role within the park boundaries and to at least limit it to what is absolutely necessary to take place in the field. Any enlargement would require additional infrastructure (accommodation, water supply, sewage systems, etc.), which is contradictory to the goals of a nature reserve.

Several alpine cabins and mountain huts are distributed over the Park and more frequently used in summer than in winter. A reconstruction of the Watzmann house has been stopped and will be reviewed by the authorities. Proposals to build a sewage and water pipe are opposed by the park administration for understandable reasons.

4.5 Connectivity of the area

Ecological connectivity with other areas

An immediate connection exists between the National Park and the adjoining protected areas in Salzburg (Austria). Regular contacts are established. The Berchtesgaden National Park lies within the territorial applicability of the Alpine Convention.

As a member of ALPARC, a network of alpine protected areas, the Berchtesgaden National Park participates in cross-border projects. Furthermore, the National Park is in close contact with the Hohe Tauern National Park (Austria) and a member of EUROPARC.

5. Conditions and Recommendations 2010

The last appraisal took place in 2009. In 2010, the Committee of Ministers decided to attach nine recommendations to the renewal of the European Diploma.⁸

1. *prepare and adopt by 2012 a new management plan including quantitative objectives to be reached during the following period and, to this effect, provide the necessary financial and human resources;*

The management plan is still under discussion. An external contractor has been involved. The new management plan should be approved by mid-2020. It should be noted that this recommendation should have been formulated as a condition.

2. *include in the plan a provision for continuing a comprehensive long-term research programme, in close collaboration with other alpine protected areas and other relevant networks;*

The administration confirmed to follow this recommendation and to consider topics relevant for the further development of the National Park, including the effects of climate change. For details, see the annual report 2018.

3. *prepare sectoral plans for activities and the use of resources that are compatible with conservation objectives, as integrated parts of the new management plan and taking into account the background of climate change; special attention should be given to:*
 - a. *military activities;*
 - b. *recreation and the promotion of nature tourism, in co-operation with the mountain guide organisation; providing specific training courses for the guides;*
 - c. *visitor infrastructures, trail marking, usage and maintenance of mountain huts;*
 - d. *mountain grazing during the summer, including water supply;*
 - e. *water resources management, taking into account the needs of the surrounding communities;*

The administration is committed to developing the National Park effectively. The various topics should be represented in the management plan in general. A special case is the German army exercising in

⁸ CM/ResDip(2010)7

parts of the National Park. An agreement determines the range of activities and the use of the airspace. A reduction of helicopter flights is under discussion.

4. *consequently pursue the transformation of spruce forests into mixed forests until the integration of the intervention zone into the core area is finalised;*

With the integration of the temporary management zone into the core zone, silviculture measures in the core zone are completed. 4000 ha pure spruce stands within the management zone, altered by former human activities (salt mines, see above), will consequently be transformed into mixed forests.

5. *continue targeted interventions to control the bark beetle proliferation, but without enlarging the bark beetle management zone, and maintain wildlife pressure at an acceptable level;*

Bark beetle control is carried out in a special zone, which is part of the management zone. Gaps are filled with plantations as well as natural rejuvenation. Game regulation happens in the management zone to secure the rejuvenation of the forest. Reed deer is held in winter enclosures in the low areas of the Park.

6. *anticipate and foster the natural return of large carnivores in the park area and communicate with the public about the benefits this may bring; develop a strategy and action plan to deal with this issue, including cattle protection measures and the training of shepherds;*

The National Park considers the Bavarian strategy for wildlife management, including large carnivores. No singular plan is foreseen.

7. *pursue the collaboration with the Austrian administration (Amt der Salzburger Landesregierung) and the Nature Park and develop synergies with the Berchtesgadener Alps Biosphere Reserve and the Natura 2000 network; promote exchanges of best management practices with other alpine protected areas;*

Berchtesgaden National Park is in close contact with the Austrian authorities as well as the nature park administration. It also participates in various international programmes.

8. *build and equip the park centre "Haus der Berge"; secure the personnel resources to fully realise its potential as a source of information, as an education centre and for the promotion of the park's goods and services;*

The visitors' centre has been successfully working since 2013 and was visited by more than one million guests. Nevertheless, more staff is needed to meet all demands.

9. *further promote the development of the public transportation system within the park and adjacent protected territories; develop a strategy to reduce the private vehicle traffic to and within the park.*

All meeting points in the Park can be accessed by public transport. Guests staying in the region can use public transport free of charge.

6. Conclusions

Berchtesgaden National Park, with the impressive Watzmann and the romantic scenery of the lake Königssee, offers a fascinating insight into nature. Forty years after its foundation, the National Park is not only a widely accepted protected area and a trademark for the region, but also a well-managed area, where nature can develop freely and with only little human intervention. In terms of nature, forty years are just a blink of an eye. It is acceptable that parts of the Park are still used as pastures, forest conversion measures and game regulation are carried out, as long as it is limited, and measures are based on scientific research. The only flies in the ointment are the long delay for a new management plan and the poor presentation of the European Diploma in the advertisement of the National Park.

7. Renewal of the Diploma

It is recommended to renew the European Diploma for the Berchtesgaden National Park for the period 2020 to 2030, taking into consideration the following conditions and recommendations:

Conditions

Accelerate the finalisation of the management plan currently in preparation and attach a scientific research programme to it. The Council of Europe shall be informed upon completion and approval of the document, which should be effective no later than 18 months after the renewal of the Diploma.

Recommendations

1. Include in the management plan currently in preparation specific provisions dedicated to climate change and how to address this issue in relation to the long-term conservation of rare species.
2. Abstain from any extension of forest and mountain roads and consider dismantling roads as well as abstain from additional infrastructure in the Park, including waste water pipes. If no alternative solution exists, infrastructure shall be built in existing forest roads;
3. Continue negotiating the replacement of forest grazing by light grazing;
4. Search together with the competent authorities for alternatives for the police training centre, or at least abstain from further expansions, and continue negotiations with the army to reduce the impacts of the army training ground to a minimum;
5. Conduct a scientific study on the red deer population and game regulation, including the plausibility of winter enclosures to gain enough data for the future management;
6. Conduct a study on invasive species and develop a strategy on how to react in the face of invasive species
7. Maintain the competency of hunting authority to the park administration at regional level;
8. Secure an adequate budget and staffing for the park administration to enable an effective and efficient management;
9. Limit the spotlights of the Jenner cable car to reduce light pollution and consider the construction of a path accessible for people with disabilities and a viewpoint next to the mountain station of the Jenner cable car.
10. Pursue consequently the conversion of spruce forests into mixed forests, using natural processes and disturbances e.g. bark beetle and wind fall areas as foreseen in the new conceptual framework, without enlargement of the bark beetle control zone.
11. Make more intensive use of the European Diploma logo in all information material and brochures, and explain the relevance of the Diploma wherever appropriate, first of all in the visitors' centre and on the website.

8. Acknowledgement

The administration provided an interesting programme to gain insight on the Berchtesgaden National Park, the efforts made and the current work. Various field trips and meetings with stakeholders completed the appraisal visit. Special thanks go to the director, Roland Baier, and Ulf Dworschak, but also to the National Park staff, who provided detailed information, to Landrat Georg Grabner and to all representatives of groups of interest and NGOs who shared their view on the park.