



Strasbourg, 8 March 2019
[de11e_2019.docx]

T-PVS/DE (2019) 11

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

39th meeting
Strasbourg, 3-6 December 2019

REPORT

**ON THE SPOT EXPERT APPRAISAL OF THE
DE OOSTVAARDERSPLASSEN NATURE RESERVE**

(NETHERLANDS)

30-31 August 2018

*Document prepared
by Mr Maurice Hoffmann (Belgium)*

*This document will not be distributed at the meeting. Please bring this copy.
Ce document ne sera plus distribué en réunion. Prière de vous munir de cet exemplaire.*

Table of contents

1.	Introduction.....	- 4 -
2.	Visit programme	- 5 -
3.	Summarized original motivation for application for an EDPA for Oostvaardersplassen.....	- 6 -
	3.1 Vegetation.....	- 6 -
	3.2 Ornithological features.....	- 6 -
4.	Description of the present Nature Reserve.....	- 7 -
	4.1 History of the Nature Reserve.....	- 8 -
	4.2 Landscape.....	- 9 -
	4.3 Fauna.....	- 9 -
	4.4 Flora	- 9 -
	4.5 Grazer and grazing management.....	- 11 -
	4.6 Summary of the Natura2000 management plan Oostvaardersplassen (78) (Kuil et al., 2015).....	- 12 -
	<i>De Oostvaardersplassen</i>	- 12 -
	<i>Landscape ecological processes</i>	- 12 -
	<i>Perspective to reach the N2000 conservation objectives</i>	- 13 -
	<i>Measures</i>	- 13 -
	<i>Current activities</i>	- 14 -
	<i>Monitoring and evaluation</i>	- 15 -
	<i>Licensing and enforcement</i>	- 15 -
	4.7 Management advice van Geel committee (2018).....	- 15 -
	4.8 General comments on management issues (Van Uytvanck & Hoffmann).....	- 16 -
5.	Conditions and recommendations formulated in the renewal decision of 2009:.....	- 17 -
	5.1 Conditions.....	- 17 -
	5.2 Recommendations.....	- 18 -
6.	Have conditions been met with, have recommendations sufficiently been taken care of?	- 18 -
	6.1 Conditions, 2009	- 18 -
	Condition 1.....	- 18 -
	6.2 Recommendations, 2009.....	- 20 -
	Recommendation 1	- 20 -
	Recommendation 2	- 20 -
	Recommendation 3	- 21 -
	Recommendation 4	- 22 -
	Recommendation 5	- 23 -
	Recommendation 6	- 24 -
	6.3 Changes in site management	- 26 -
	6.4 Changes in boundaries of the EDPA.....	- 28 -
	6.5 Other information reported by SBB that is not included in the conditions, recommendations, management and boundaries issues.....	- 30 -
7.	Expert advice on remaining and additional conditions and recommendations	- 32 -

7.1	Remaining conditions.....	- 32 -
7.2	New conditions	- 32 -
7.3	Remaining and new or renewed recommendations.....	- 32 -
	Recommendation 1	- 32 -
	Recommendation 2	- 33 -
	Recommendation 3	- 33 -
	Recommendation 4	- 33 -
	Recommendation 5	- 33 -
	Recommendation 6	- 33 -
	Recommendation 7	- 33 -
	Recommendation 8	- 33 -
8.	Conclusions.....	- 33 -
9.	Overall advice on conditions, recommendations and (conditional) renewal.....	- 34 -
	Renewal?.....	- 35 -
10.	References.....	- 35 -
	10.1 Cited written references	- 35 -
	10.2 Consulted websites	- 37 -

1. INTRODUCTION

The period of validity for the European Diploma of Protected Areas for the Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve expires in 2019. In accordance with the regulations, an on-the-spot appraisal was carried out in August 2018 in preparation of a third renewal of the Diploma. The Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve was awarded the European Diploma of Protected Area (EDPA) on behalf of the Council of Europe (CoE) in 1999 for the first time. A first renewal was assigned in 2004, a second in 2009.

For practical reasons (combination of two Dutch EDPA's for which renewal is due within a period of two years (Weerribben-Wieden National Park (2020) and Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve (2019)), it was decided by the CoE-Secretariat that both expert visits would best be combined in 2018 and carried out by the same expert. This report refers to the expert renewal appraisal of the Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve. The expert was not accompanied by people of the CoE-Secretariat.

The field visits to the Oostvaardersplassen area were organised on:

Arrival: 30 August 2018

Visit of the National Park: 30-31 August 2018

Departure: 31 August 2018, 15h

The expert mandate consists of evaluating the nature values, conservation status and management aspects of the reserve and its relations with the environment. The specific task of the expert is

1. Evaluation whether conditions formulated in the second renewal report were met with;
2. The level of fulfilment of the recommendation formulated in the second renewal report;
3. Advice on new or supplementary conditions for the third renewal;
4. Advice on new or supplementary recommendations for the third renewal.

The above-mentioned questions were answered departing from the Resolution CM/ResDip(2009)6 on the renewal of the European Diploma of Protected Areas awarded to the De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve (Netherlands) (Council of Europe, 2009).

During the visit, I was extensively informed about the way the managing organisation (Staatsbosbeheer) dealt with the conditions and recommendations given by the Council in 2009, with internal and external management measures, the intentions of raising a New National Park Nieuw Land, the educational and infrastructural efforts, the public commotion around grazer management, significant changes in management approaches, partly based on the latter public commotion and new insights in management, and the potential issues concerning the planned start-up of Lelystad Airport for tourist flights in 2020.

Meetings were organised by Staatsbosbeheer (SBB) with local councillors of the municipality of Lelystad (77,000 inhabitants) and Almere (197,000 inhab.), representatives of the province of Flevoland, and managers, rangers and management representatives of SBB.

I am particularly grateful to Susan Bonekamp (SBB area manager Oostvaardersplassen), who coordinated the on-the-spot meetings and visits. Special thanks to the management staff members Hans-Erik Kuypers, (SBB ranger public) and Tjibbie Hunink, (SBB ranger ecology), Frans van Deursen (province Flevoland, project leader National Park Nieuw Land), Liesbeth Bronkhorst (Director Stad & Natuur Almere), Ton Eggenhuizen (ecologist of the municipality of Almere), Jan Willem Tap (plan mentor of Bureau Nieuwe Gracht - urban development, landscape, planology), Leen Verbeek (Governor province Flevoland and head of the Dutch delegation of members of the Council of Europe), Ed Rentenaar (alderman municipality Lelystad), Nick de Snoo (SBB head provincial unit Flevoland), Jeanine Keurentjes (SBB manager Visitor's Centre OVP), Jacco Maissan (project leader N2000, province Flevoland), Mark Waaijbergen (project leader implementation policy province Flevoland).

2. VISIT PROGRAMME

Thursday 30 August 2018 Uytv			
Start	End	Subject	Spokesmen on behalf of the OVP Nature Reserve
15.30	15.40	Welcome in Visitor's Centre OVP (Kitsweg 1, Lelystad)	Susan Bonekamp, SBB area manager Oostvaardersplassen Frans van Deursen, province Flevoland, project leader National Park Nieuw Land Hans-Erik Kuypers, SBB ranger public
	17.00	Via Oostvaardersdijk to Almere Introduction New National Park Nieuw Land	Susan Bonekamp, Frans van Deursen, Hans-Erik Kuypers
17.00	18.30	Development Almeersepoort and NP Nieuw Land. Location: Visitor's Centre De Oostvaarders, Almere	Liesbeth Bronkhorst, director Stad & Natuur Almere Jan Willem Tap, plan mentor Bureau nieuwe Gracht, urban development, landscape, planology Ton Eggenhuizen, ecologist municipality of Almere Frans van Deursen, Susan Bonekamp, Hans-Erik Kuypers
18.30	19.15	Field trip 'surrounding areas' between Almere and Lelystad. Explanation on developments.	Hans-Erik Kuypers, Frans van Deursen, Susan Bonekamp
19.15	21.30	Dinner in Visitor's Centre OVP. Informal discussion on developments of OVP s.l., e.g. New policy, N2000, state of the art Lelystad Airport, New National Park Nieuw Land, Gate Lelystad, development Visitors centres and management office	Leen Verbeek, Governor province Flevoland and head of the Dutch delegation of members of the Council of Europe Ed Rentenaar, alderman municipality Lelystad Nick de Snoo, head provincial unit Flevoland (SBB) Jeanine Keurentjes, manager Visitor's Centre OVP Frans van Deursen, Susan Bonekamp, Hans-Erik Kuypers
Friday 31 august 2018			
8.30	9.00	Construction of management office and field station	Susan Bonekamp
9.00	10.30	Field trip Hollandse Hout, Gate Lelystad NP Nieuw Land	Hans-Erik Kuypers
10.30	12.00	Discussion of new governance and implementation of and execution of N2000 measures at OVP management office	Jacco Maissan, project leader N2000, provincie Flevoland Mark Waaijbergen, projectleider implementation policy, provincie Flevoland Tjibbe Hunink, ranger ecology, Staatsbosbeheer Susan Bonekamp
12.00	14.00	Field trip core area	Tjibbe Hunink

		OVP	
14.00	15.00	Final discussion	Susan Bonekamp, Hans-Erik Kuypers

3. SUMMARIZED ORIGINAL MOTIVATION FOR APPLICATION FOR AN EDPA FOR OOSTVAARDERSPLASSEN

According to the application document of the 12th of January 1998, under the heading “European interest justifying the application”, the following justifications were given:

The Nature Reserve was notified as a 'Wetland of international importance' according to the Ramsar Convention in January 1989. The area fulfils the requirements for qualification as a Special Protected Area (SPA) in accordance with the EC Bird Directive (May 1989) and may qualify for special status according to the EC Habitat Directive.

3.1 Vegetation

The marshland part of 'De Oostvaardersplassen' currently (i.e. 1998) consists of open water for 34% (1 200 ha) and of closed reed vegetation (*Phragmites australis*) for 54% (1 900 ha). Willow woodlands and scrub, which includes plants such as Great willow herb (*Epilobium hirsutum*), Stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*), Bindweed (*Calystegia sepium*) and Gipsy wort (*Leucopus europaeus*) - make up the rest of the marshland zone.

The muddy water prevents the growth of water plants, both floating and submerged plants. Sight is so poor in the open water that it offers few possibilities for birds and fish. Furthermore, minimal geographic relief means that ponds are never more than one metre deep.

In the reed lands of the marshland zone, a distinction can be made between reed lands that are grazed by moulting geese in spring and fields where almost no grazing by geese occurs. The geese not only prevent 'De Oostvaardersplassen' from becoming overgrown by reeds, they can actually cause the reed vegetation to retreat. Reed vegetation is very monotonous. Local pockets of Bindweed, Marsh fleawort (*Senecio palustris*) and/or Woody nightshade (*Solanum dulcamara*) only occur in the more open places. Cover in the old reed lands is extremely dense and, in some places, reed reaches heights up to four metres. Sections of reed lands regularly deteriorate due to a massive invasion of the reed-boring pest *Archanara geminipuncta*.

Currently, pioneer vegetation, with species such as Marsh fleawort, Red goosefoot (*Chenopodium rubrum*), Sorrel (*Rumex*), Blister plant (*Ranunculus sceleratus*) and Great bulrush (*Typha latifolia*), occurs only in patches spread throughout the area. This is due to the limited places suitable for the development of pioneer vegetation (bare silt).

Willow woodlands are common in 'De Oostvaardersplassen'. The two largest woodlands are the dry woods near the management offices and the wet woods in the eastern part of the marshland zone. The latter location is also known as the 'Cormorant Wood', since about 5 000 pairs breed here each year. White willow (*Salix alba*) and Almond willow (*Salix triandra*) are the two main species in both woodlands.

Grasslands, reed lands and scrub occur alternately in the perimeter zone of 'De Oostvaardersplassen'. Although the grassland vegetation varies, the dominant vegetation component is Perennial rye-grass (*Lolium perenne*), Timothy (*Phleum pratense*), Cock's Foot (*Dactylis glomerata*), Rough Meadow grass (*Poa trivialis*), Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*) and Marsh Foxtail (*Alopecurus geniculatus*). The dry reed lands have of a fairly monotonous cover of Reed (*Phragmites australis*). In other places, a small mosaic of reed land and scrub has developed, in which Stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*), Creeping thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) and Hemp agrimony (*Eupatorium cannabinum*) occur. Common elder (*Sambucus nigra*) grows well in this scrub and is slowly increasing in density. In all parts within this scrub vegetation, Common Elder bushes (*Sambucus nigra*) have practically the same age of about ten years.

3.2 Ornithological features

The great variety of birdlife in 'De Oostvaardersplassen' often leads to comparisons with famous marshland areas such as the Camargue (Rhône Delta, France) and the Cota Donana (at the mouth of the Guadalquivir, Spain). Some 260 bird species - breeding birds as well as migrating and/or wintering birds - have been sighted in the area. Marshland birds dominate the scene in the breeding season.

Major species are Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*), Spoonbill (*Patalea leucorodia*), Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*), Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*), Bluethroat (*Luscinia svecica*) and Bearded Tit (*Panurus biarmicus*) (more than 1 000 breeding pairs). The first breeding pair of Great White Heron (*Egretta alba*) in north-western Europe was sighted in 'De Oostvaardersplassen' in 1979. Other successful breeding pairs were not seen again until the 1990's. Year-round, 'De Oostvaardersplassen' fulfils an important role for migratory birds. From late April until early June, thousands of (non-breeding) Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*) from Germany and Sweden flock to the area to moult.

Large numbers of geese (*Anser spec.*) also visit the area in winter, especially for resting and sleeping. The arable land in other parts of Flevoland serve as winter feeding grounds. When low water levels lay bare extensive shallows and fields of silt in spring and late summer, the number of waders increases, particularly Avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*), Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*) and Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*). In autumn, large concentrations of swimming ducks gather in the area, but their numbers are determined to a large extent by the available food supply. Until the 1980s, Black Terns (*Chlidonias niger*) which foraged on the Markermeer and IJsselmeer by day used 'De Oostvaardersplassen' to bed down at night. The local Black Tern population would make up 50 to 80% of the total bird population there (for example, 35 000 in August 1981). The winter is a relatively quiet time, aside from geese (*Anser spec.*) who sleep in the area, but in stormy weather the ponds are a sanctuary for large numbers of diving ducks and Goosanders (*Mergus merganser*) which forage on the Markermeer and IJsselmeer. A species that occurs in the area year-round is the Bearded Tit (*Panurus biarmicus*), a reed bird that lives on insects in summer and reed seed in winter. 'De Oostvaardersplassen' its qualifications as an SPA area (in accordance with the EU Bird Directive) and as a Wetland are based on the occurrence of a number of species of breeding birds and non-breeding birds, i.e. breeding birds Cormorant, Bittern, Spoonbill, Marsh Harrier, Hen Harrier, Avocet and Bluethroat. The qualifying species of non-breeding birds are Whooper Swan, White-fronted Goose, Greylag Goose, Barnacle Goose, Wigeon, Gadwall, Teal, Pintail, Shoveler, Tufted Duck, White-tailed Eagle, Avocet, Ruff, Black-tailed Godwit, Caspian Tern and Black Tern (note: the status of breeding or non-breeding bird has in some occasions changed since the application date).

4. DESCRIPTION OF THE PRESENT NATURE RESERVE

The Nature Reserve "De Oostvaardersplassen" (OVP) is situated in the polder Zuidelijk Flevoland in the municipality of Lelystad (province Flevoland, the Netherlands). It raised in 1968 on reclaimed clayey seabed of what was once the Zuiderzee. In its short existence, the area has evolved into one of the major marshland areas of northwestern Europe. In ecological terms, the area is particularly valued for the great number of birds that breed, moult and/or winter here. Around 260 species have been sighted, including at least 30 species of breeding birds on the 'IUCN Red List'. It is managed by Staatsbosbeheer.

A good description of the area, its short history and its grazing management history is given by Cornelissen (2017): "The Oostvaardersplassen (5600 ha) is a man-made, eutrophic wetland in the Zuidelijk Flevoland polder in the Netherlands, reclaimed from lake IJsselmeer in 1968 (see Vulink and van Eerden 1998). Originally, the Oostvaardersplassen was planned as an industrial and agricultural area. At the end of the 1970s, part of the area had already been prepared for agricultural use. In an area of about 750 ha, only ditches had been dug and a road provided. The original vegetation had been left to develop spontaneously (Jans & Drost, 1995). Three habitat types can be distinguished in the area: grasslands (*Poa trivialis*, *Lolium perenne*, *Trifolium repens*), reed land (*Phragmites australis*) and a semi-open mosaic vegetation of reed, tall ruderal herbs (*Urtica dioica*, *Cirsium spp.*), *Sambucus nigra* and *Salix spp.* Most of the *Salix spp.*, mainly *Salix alba* L., established on the bare soil in 1968, immediately after the water was pumped out of the polder and the surface area became dry. *Sambucus nigra* established some years later.

In the area with spontaneous vegetation succession, shrubs and trees were not evenly distributed. The cover of *Sambucus nigra* was greater at locations with a mosaic vegetation of tall herbs (e.g. *Urtica dioica*, *Cirsium spp.*) and reed (*Phragmites australis*) than in areas with a 100% reed vegetation (Jans & Drost, 1995). This dense reed vegetation had thick litter layers (up to 25 cm; personal observation by Perry Cornelissen) which can have major impact on seedling establishment and subsequent performance (Crawley 1997). The thick litter layers were absent in the tall herb vegetation. Such

differences in litter layer could have been responsible for the differences in establishment and cover of woody species between the two vegetation types.



© Jasja Dekker, aerial view of the marshland area of the Nature Reserve Oostvaardersplassen

4.1 History of the Nature Reserve

An excellent overview of the short history of the Nature Reserve is given through a list of events since its year of creation from the IJsselmeer as a clayey polder in 1968 (abstracted from <https://www.staatsbosbeheer.nl/over-staatsbosbeheer/dossiers/oostvaardersplassen-beheer/feiten-en-cijfers/jaartallen>):

- 1968 inpoldering Flevoland
- 1974 construction of quay to preserve marsh
- 1982 construction of railway
- 1983 introduction heck cattle
- 1984 introduction of konik horses
- 1986 designation as a natural monument
- 1989 designation as a Birds Directive
- 1989 designation as Wetland under the Ramsar Convention
- 1992 introduction of red deer
- 1996 in management Staatsbosbeheer
- 1999 Appraisal of the European diploma for protected areas (EDPA)
- 1999 Establishing Ethical Guidelines
- 2000 Establishing the Guidelines for Large Grazers by the House of Representatives
- 2004 Renewal of the European diploma for protected areas (EDPA)
- 2005 Parliamentary debate on winter mortality in OVP
- 2006 ICMO report on Oostvaardersplassen management
- 2007 Court of Appeal ruling on the big grazers
- 2009 Second renewal European diploma for protected areas (EDPA)
- 2010 Final designation decision Natura 2000 published
- 2010 ICMO report evaluation management
- 2010 Parliamentary debate about bringing forward the evaluation of nature policy

- 2011 First helicopter count of large grazers
- 2013 Film “De Nieuwe Wildernis” is presented and attracts over 700 000 visitors
- 2016 Natura 2000 management plan is established
- 2017 Agreement between the Ministry of Economic Affairs and GS Province Flevoland
- 2017 Province of Flevoland: initiative proposal Oostvaardersplassen area
- 2018 50 years of Oostvaardersplassen and 100 years of Zuiderzee law
- 2018 Commission van Geel: advice management Oostvaardersplassen

4.2 Landscape

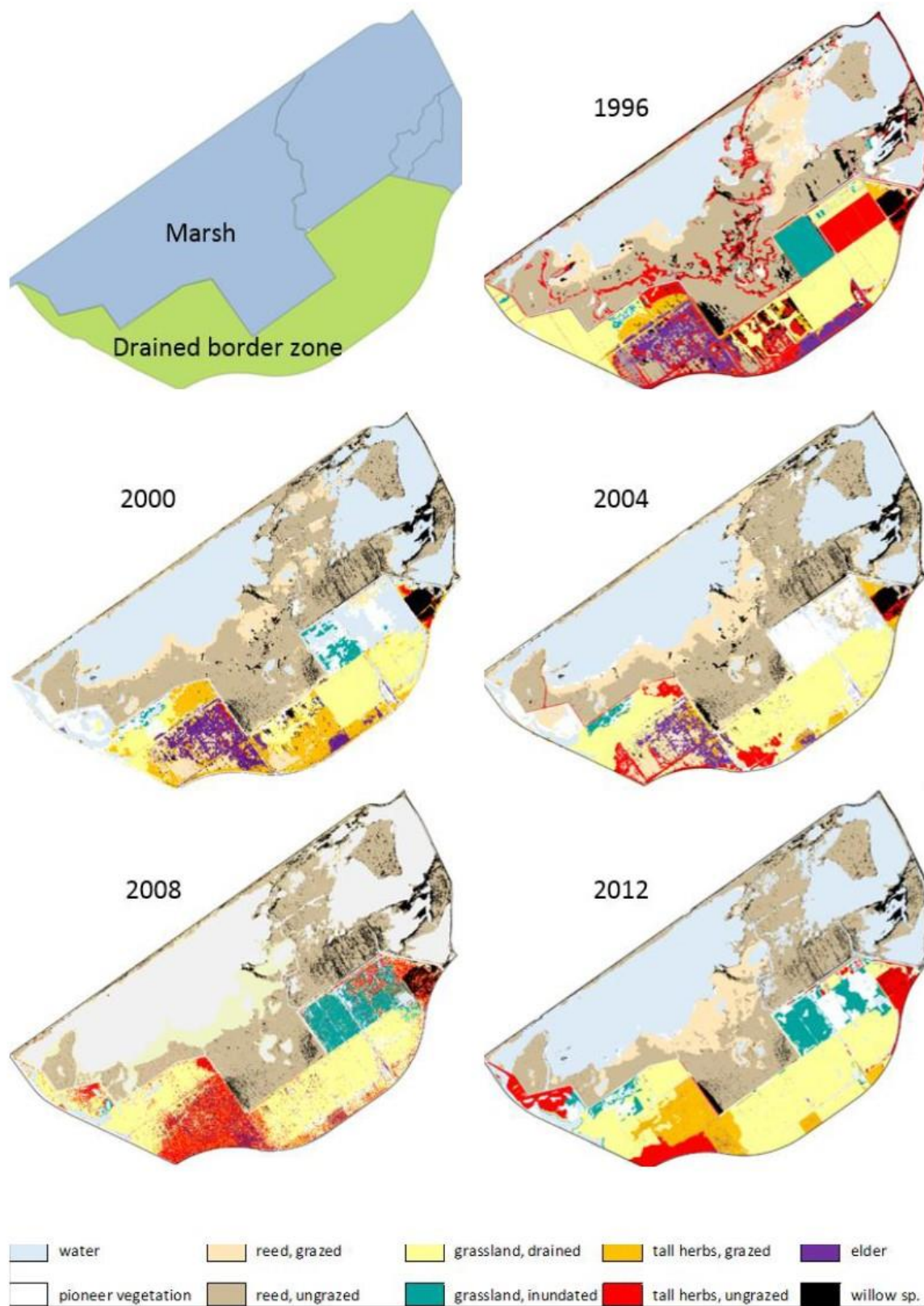
The Oostvaarderplassen landscape is dominated by three major units, a large open fresh water area in the north, bordered by large continuous reed lands to the south and southwest. In the south-eastern part a more or less flat grassland area developed under grazing by geese and large mammal herbivores. Along non-grazed edges some willow woodland developed. A growing buffer zones of woodland is surrounding the core area in the west, south, and northeast.

4.3 Fauna

For a general, largely still applicable description of the (avi)faunal values of the area, we refer to paragraph 3.2. It remains the main reason for being rewarded the European Diploma of Protected Area. In 2002 for the first time a nest was built by juvenile Ospreys. The nest was been blown out of the trees prematurely, but it still feeds the hope that the Osprey will breed in the area in the future. The Black Stork and the White-tailed Eagle can also be seen with certain regularity in the Oostvaardersplassen. The latter settled in 2006 as a breeding bird.

4.4 Flora

The flora of the Nature Reserve is dominated by very eurytopic, banal plant species, typical of nutrient-rich, disturbed circumstances with a large quantity of pioneer species. No red-list species or more stenotopic plant species are known from the area.

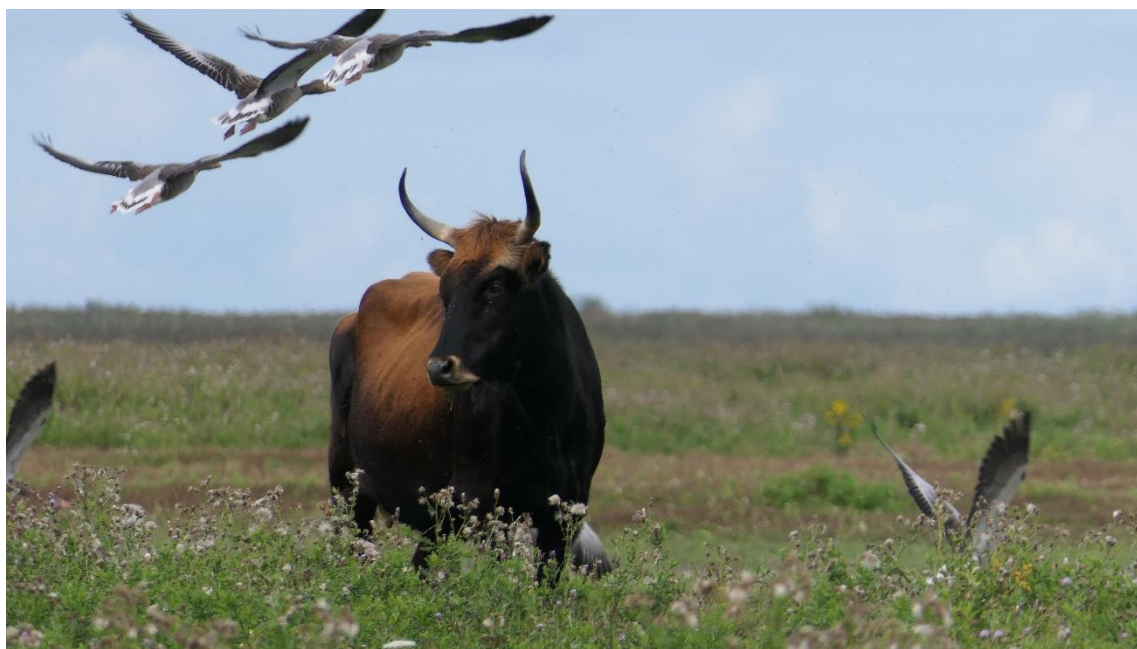


Vegetation development in the Oostvaardersplassen (Cornelissen 2017).

4.5 Grazer and grazing management

The Oostvaardersplassen, a man-made wetland Nature Reserve, is often referred to as one of the first areas where the rewilding concept *avant-la-lettre* was applied to (e.g. Lorimer and Driessen 2013; Jørgensen 2015). In this eutrophic wetland, vegetation has developed spontaneously in large parts of the area since 1968 (reclamation of the polder Zuidelijk Flevoland), while the area was grazed by cattle, horses and red deer, introduced in 1983, 1984 and 1992, respectively. The aim of these introductions was to create large scale open grasslands for a variety of wetland birds. The population numbers of the large herbivores are (until 2018) not controlled, large predators are not present, and the area is fenced. The population sizes of the large herbivore species are bottom-up regulated by plant biomass production and the feeding and weather conditions during winters. Interactions between different herbivore species, both facilitation and competition among large herbivores and between large and small herbivores (geese), have crucial impacts on large herbivore population dynamics.

Cornelissen (2017) gives a good summary of the grazer management until the major die back of animals in the winter of 2017-18. Most of the large herbivores of the Oostvaardersplassen were introduced. Only Roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*) spontaneously colonised the area in the early 1970s, but decreased strongly after 1992 and had gone after 2005. Cattle, horses and red deer were introduced into the Oostvaardersplassen: 32 Heck cattle (*Bos taurus*) in 1983, 18 Konik horses (*Equus caballus*) in 1984, and 52 red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) in 1992. The introduced animals were restricted to small areas during the first period after introduction. Thereafter, they were introduced to larger areas. Cattle and horses were introduced to a larger area in 1984 and 1986, respectively. Between 1992 and 1996 the area grazed by cattle and horses was enlarged several times. In 1996 cattle and horses could use the entire Oostvaardersplassen. Red deer were introduced in March 1992 and were kept in a small enclosure for about 4 months. After this period, the red deer were released and could use the entire Oostvaardersplassen area as well. In January 2013, 300 cattle, 1150 horses and 3200 red deer were present. Herbivore management was limited in that period: individuals considered to have no chance of survival were shot at the end of winter, in order to prevent unnecessary suffering. There are no large predators in the area and the large herbivores did not get supplementary feeding. A survey in the early 1990s revealed that small mammal herbivores (rabbit or hare) were rare (Lange and Margry 1992; unpublished data). Last winter (2017-18), 22% of the red deer died, 14% of the Koniks (horses) and 34% of the Heck cattle in the Oostvaardersplassen (Vera 2018). This led to massive national public protest from an animal welfare point of view.



4.6 Summary of the Natura2000 management plan Oostvaardersplassen (78) (Kuil et al., 2015)



De Oostvaardersplassen

The area consists of a marsh area (approx. 3600 ha) and a grassland area (around 1800 ha). The marsh part has an eastern and a western compartment. Together the marsh area and the grassland area of the Oostvaardersplassen form an ecologically functional unit. A number of young forests surround the area. These fall outside the boundaries of the Natura 2000 area, but contribute together with the surrounding agricultural areas to the achievement of some of the conservation objectives.

The water system is of crucial importance for conservation, and deserves special attention. By settling the soil after draining the grassland area, the special circumstance occurs that the water level in the swamp area is higher than in the grassland area. Investments have been made in the construction of quays and drainage points to prevent the swamp area from drying out.

Landscape ecological processes

The ecological system is constantly influenced and shaped by numerous processes, some of which are seasonal. The most important are:

Water level dynamics

In 1975, a quay was constructed around the marsh area, which had to prevent this area from drying out. In addition to the quay, a pump and a drainage system were also installed; They regulate the water level in the Oostvaardersplassen. The marsh area functions as an uninterrupted unit, whereby the natural course of precipitation and evaporation is now taken as the starting point for the management of the water level. Micro relief and water level dynamics contribute to the emergence of a variety of habitats at varying locations.

Reed grazing by geese

Because geese eat the perennial reed, reed vegetation and shallow open water alternate. This creates an important habitat for various marsh birds, including Spotted Crake and several Heron and Egret species.

Year-round grazing by Red Deer, Konik horses and Heck Cattle

The year-round grazing by large herbivores allows geese, swans and Wigeon to forage on nutrient rich grasses. Particularly in spring and summer, the grazed grasslands are of essential importance to non-breeding Graylag Goose, that moult in the swamp area and strengthen and recover in the grassland area.

Perspective to reach the N2000 conservation objectives

With continuation of the current management, the conservation goals for 19 up to 23 bird species will not be met with in the long run. The ecological requirements for a good conservation status of the Natura 2000 species are not sufficiently fulfilled, because a number of key factors/processes in the Oostvaardersplassen are not assured. The most important bottlenecks are:

- Insufficient water level dynamics in the swamp area;
- Insufficient connectivity of water in and outside the area;
- Lack of (shallow) pools and un-grazed islands.

In order to improve these processes, measures are needed in both the swamp area, the grassland area and the surrounding environment.

The plant and animal species in a wetland can vary strongly in space and time, especially if the water level varies considerably over the years; the Oostvaardersplassen are no exception to that rule. The presence of Natura 2000 bird species can also fluctuate strongly from year to year. In addition, the spectrum of Natura 2000 species is so large that the conditions cannot be beneficial for all species at all times.

From the past it is known that a cyclic succession of water level reduction and elevation in the swamp area ensures a succession of 'peaks' of different bird species. The aim is to create such preconditions by optimizing water management in a way that the goals are secured over a long-term period (20 to 30 years). In combination with the large scale of the area, optimization of the water dynamics will lead to sufficient quality of habitat for all marshland species to enable to achieve the conservation objectives. This is based on experiences with previous water level reductions and re-inundations and the period thereafter. From year to year, depending on the weather conditions and the micro relief present, the conditions will vary per type in terms of space and quality.

By supplementing with measures in the grassland area, it is expected that sufficient suitable habitat will also be available for the species that (partly) depend on the grassland area over a long-term period. For the Hen Harrier, additional measures are required outside the N2000 area (field margins, road verge management).

Measures

To be effective, the management plan invests in only a few large-scale interventions in the swamp area and, in addition, a number of small-scale interventions in the grassland area and in the area surrounding the N2000 site.

Measures in the swamp area

First, a succession regression intervention is carried out by means of active water level reduction and re-inundation. This way a reset of the vegetation development and fish fauna in the swamp area is realized. 'Active water level reduction' means introduction of a period of three years in which the water level in the entire swamp area is drastically reduced (also in winter). The period of (gradual) reintegration then also lasts for at least three years. Based on earlier cycles of long-term lowering of water levels and re-inundation in the swamp area, it is known that these interventions have a significant influence on the numbers of marsh bird species and waterfowl for about 10 years, departing from the start of a dry period and the current form of the drainage work. The effect consists of successive high peaks of the populations of different species of swamp and water birds in the area, which after a number of years drop to a lower level.

In addition, measures are taken to create a suitable basis for a rain model, in which human intervention is not or hardly necessary anymore. By adapting the drainage work, the greatest possible seasonal and annual frame dynamics must be achieved (the level is relatively high in winter and falls in summer). Because winter level is relatively high and decreases in summer, there is a need for infrastructure that

enables drainage all year round, less in winter and in summer only when the water level drops below the current weir level (NAP -3.70m).

The two measures are expected to reinforce each other, because the second measure increases the periods of water level reduction and re-inundation, which increases both seasonal and annual dynamics. The advantage of this is that a restart does not have to take place every 10 to 15 years, and that in the best case no active water level reduction and inundation will be required.



Central weir in the core area of the OVP Nature Reserve

Measures in the grassland area

In the grassland area several measures must be taken. Additional fish passages should provide a better connection between the waters inside and outside the area. This is important in order to increase the foraging possibilities of Spoonbill and several Heron species that predate on fish species, such as Stickleback. The Waterlands are set up as a periodic flooding and grazing area. In combination with the eastern and western swamp areas, it is possible to ensure favourable conditions during the seasons for a maximum number of species. The un-deepening of a number of ponds and digging of a number of additional pools will also contribute to increasing the foraging possibilities of Spoonbill and Heron and Egret species. Finally, the construction of un-grazed islands leads to locations where Little Grebe and Spotted Crake can breed.

Measures needed outside the Natura2000 area

The presence of (young) rabbits in the open areas in the Kotterbos can be strengthened significantly by locally creating sand heaps along the forest edges to enable them to create warrens. Young rabbits are a potentially important prey for (females of) the Hen Harrier during the breeding season. In the interest of the same bird species, it is being investigated whether it is possible to manage the verges at certain locations as Harrier friendly as possible and what possibilities would be available to install a suitable arable land verge management; The installation of field reserves is considered, with different types of grain cultures and in which mice reduction measures are avoided.

Re-introductions

To increase the food supply for Spoonbill and Harrier species, it will be investigated whether the (re-) introduction of Tadpole Shrimp and the Root or Tundra Vole is possible.

Current activities

The management plan shows that current activities have no significant negative effect on the nature of the Oostvaardersplassen. Although a small number of activities have a limited negative effect on

achieving a number of conservation objectives, these activities have only limited effect on the poor conservation status of the species concerned. The biggest problem is the lack of sufficient water dynamics in the area. In order to achieve the conservation objectives, it is therefore not necessary to limit or stop the current activities. In other words, the large number of functions of the Natura 2000 area and the surrounding areas match well together.

Monitoring and evaluation

The monitoring program is part of the management plan. By monitoring the relevant species and habitat types, it is possible to evaluate the effect of the measures. On the basis of this evaluation, the current management plan, with a duration of 6 years, can be extended by another 6 years, adjusted or adapted according to the evaluation outcome.

Licensing and enforcement

The competent authorities for granting of permits in the context of the 1998 Nature Conservation Act are the Provincial Executive of the province of Flevoland. The Environmental Service Flevoland and Staatsbosbeheer are jointly responsible for enforcement and supervision.

4.7 Management advice van Geel committee (2018).

The Province asked an external expert committee led by Pieter van Geel to give advice on the management of the OVP; the advice report was presented in April 2017, i.e. before the great die back of large herbivores in winter 2017-18. The report was ordered because of on-going public and professional discussions on the management, mainly caused by public concern about animal welfare. The committee tried to outline a perspective for socially-supported management of the large grazers. They further tried to develop a vision that would allow to look at all aspects of the area in an integrated way, i.e. from nature values to economic significance. The van Geel report advised to manage the grazer population pro-actively (literally early reactively) instead of applying a rewilding approach. The consequence would be a reduction of the numbers of remaining animals either by replacing or shooting. The latter suggestion led to another outburst of protests.

The entire advice deals with many more issues than the management of large herbivores. General conclusion is that the rewilding approach should be departed and replaced by a pro-active animal management departing from maximum carrying capacity of the grazed area and animal welfare principles. One of the major reasons for departing the rewilding principle in the first place was the impossibility to enlarge the grazed area that should allow large herbivores to migrate to other areas in times of food shortage (see recommendation 6 in the second renewal report).

On the grazer issues, the van Geel committee advice can be summarized as follows: “The Committee recommends that for the time being a maximum number of 1,500 animals be maintained for a number of years (counts at the autumn assessment). This number of 1500 or the equivalent in weights can be adjusted upwards or downwards over the years on the basis of monitoring the realisation of the Natura 2000 targets, the development of vegetation and the development of the herds and the welfare of the animals. This concerns monitoring data over a series of years (at least three years). The management based on this monitoring should lead to a natural dynamic balance of the large grazers in their environment.

The Committee argues that a possible change in the ceiling of 1,500 animals should only take place on the basis of motivation from the monitoring of the various quantities mentioned above. This amendment must be formalized by a decision of the Provincial Executive of Flevoland.

Reset the number of large grazers

Van Geel (2017) mentions a number of reasons to reset the number of large grazers in the grassy part of the core area by 2018 and to achieve a reduction in the numbers in that year, leading to a population size of approximately 1100 animals. This would mean that the aforementioned ceiling of 1500 animals would be achieved in the event of population growth of approximately 30% and winter mortality due to factors other than a food shortage of approximately 10% in two years. The reasons for the reset are:

- the observed poor condition of the turf at the beginning of 2018, on the basis of which it can be expected that a good recovery will take some time and that a grazing pressure lower than 1.4 animal per hectare offers room for recovery; good grass is necessary to allow the animals

to produce sufficient fat during the summer period and to prevent grass shortages in the next winter;

- that extra lowering of the grazing pressure gives way to the dynamics of vegetation types and structures in the part that is grazed;
- that in the coming years various facilities will have to be taken in the area - both in the marsh part and in the outer quay section; this requires 'work space' in the area;
- an extra reduction of grazing pressure gives the province and Staatsbosbeheer the time and space to explore a number of issues with third parties in the years 2018 and 2019.



4.8 General comments on management issues (Van Uytvanck & Hoffmann)

We notice a complete shift from a Minimal Intervention Ecosystem Approach to a management approach entirely in function of more or less deterministic nature goals (N2000, mainly bird populations and "animal welfare"). As such, there's nothing wrong with such an approach, but in this way, the earlier basic philosophy behind the OVP to install a process driven management has largely been abandoned, and a much more deterministic approach has been installed. The Minimum Intervention Ecosystem Approach has always been experienced in science and nature management as a unique feature of OVP, distinguishing it from many, if not all other nature management approaches in Europe. We always considered it one of the prime added values of the newly created nature area, next to its high waterfowl and marsh bird species richness. Other qualities of floristic, landscape, vegetation driven, historical nature are of minor relevance, and were in our opinion never to be considered as main drivers for awarding the OVP Nature Reserve with the EDPA.

Why the shift in management?

Public opinion:

- Dying animals in nature are a consequence of the choice of non-intervention. But that choice also stands for truly free-living herds, making social behaviour possible, building family ties, living in large open spaces, and hence behaviour-driven patterns and processes. These "values" cannot be reached when we keep and treat the animals as agricultural livestock.
- The turbulent reactions to the "animal suffering" in the OVP are possibly (probably) precisely the reason for the shooting of hundreds of red deer, as a result of which the public turmoil is again stimulated, and animals will have to be shot in the future too.

In other words, public opinion (e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9VuLM4LLJOgb>) as a guide to management is not always the best choice for designing the management of an area, but at the same time it is a very understandable, perhaps unavoidable approach, certainly in such a densely populated (humans) area.

Deterministic N2000 goals:

- Next to the public opinion as driver, the other driver is the deterministic approach of the European bird and habitat directive or at least the way it is interpreted by managers and administrations. It urges managers to be equally deterministic in their management measures, leaving less opportunities of basic characteristics of nature, such as spontaneity and naturalness.

General comment on the new management choices

To our opinion, grazing management now makes a choice that is half-hearted: one departs from a more natural population development of the large herbivores, which was to be defended from a scientific point of view (experiment) and of which we will never know definitive results, while something is put in place of which there is also little salvation to be expected *with regard to vegetation development*. In combination with the plantings there seems to be a chance that something like an English landscape park will develop with short grazed grasslands and bushes, rather remote from

“wild nature”.

With regard to the marsh management, we are strongly in favour of restoring dynamics, even if it goes hand in hand with artificial reclamation every 10-20 years. As a result, the bird populations will fluctuate with, in one period, Bluethroats, other Warblers, ... that build up in dry periods alternating with bitterns, herons and diving waterfowl, with a recovering high water level. We are also in favour of wetting the grassland system. Perhaps this could create a more gradient-richer situation in a relatively uniform area in terms of abiotic structure.

How about the Minimal Intervention System?

This management is also far from ideal, especially in the grassland area. To give natural processes and rich nature real opportunities, more than the current design and the introduction of large herbivores is needed. E.g. natural migration processes are impossible due to fencing of the Nature Reserve, and no prospects of any major changes on that issue. Additionally, predators of large mammal herbivores are absent and therefore cannot influence the population development and (perhaps more importantly) habitat use of the prey species. Also, in this respect there are no "safe sites" for vegetation to escape from grazing. Around the area there is still a fence so that the expected natural migration of large herbivores in times of food scarcity cannot take place. In this respect it is extremely unfortunate that an ecological connection with the Horsterwold has been abandoned, as a connection to the Veluwe is. This could partly have remediated problems of the presently existing overgrazing in the OVP.

General conclusions on management choices

We are in favour of a system where action is taken at the level of the entire area, both in terms of the marsh system (water level management) and the grazing regime. In addition, natural populations fluctuations (due to migration, disease, predation) must and can be simulated. What these fluctuations and numbers look like and put into practice may be subject of new research (nutrient-rich reference areas, models, ...). In any case, the current grazing pressure in natural system is never as high as in the OVP, also with the implementation of the van Geel management advice, and will never result in a more variable vegetation structure referring to the shifting mosaics model of Olf et al. (1999).

5. CONDITIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FORMULATED IN THE RENEWAL DECISION OF 2009:

Resolution CM/ResDip(2009)6 on the renewal of the European Diploma of Protected Areas awarded to the De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve (Netherlands) (*Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 21 October 2009 at the 1068th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies*)

5.1 Conditions

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.a of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Having regard to the proposals of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention, Renews the European Diploma of Protected Areas to the De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve until 9 September 2019;

Having regard to Resolution Res (65) 6 instituting the European Diploma for certain protected landscapes, reserves and natural features, as amended by Resolution [CM/ResDip\(2008\)1](#) on the revised regulations for the European Diploma of Protected Areas;

Having regard to Resolution Res (99) 18 on the award of the European Diploma of Protected Areas to the De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve (Netherlands);

Taking into consideration the expert's report presented at the meeting of the Group of Specialists on the European Diploma of Protected Areas on 2 and 3 March 2009;

Recalling the initial condition of the award in 1999 that the project of the extension of Schiphol airport in Flevoland or Markemeer and similar projects be abandoned, as they are incompatible with the objectives of the European Diploma;

Having regard to the proposals of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention,

Renews the European Diploma of Protected Areas to the De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve until 9 September 2019; Attaches the following condition to the renewal:

With regard to new information received concerning the development of the Lelystad regional airport, despite the condition attached to the award in 1999, any development of the airport must not have any negative impact on the reserve; this is to be confirmed once the full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) procedure, including public consultation, has been finalised, and this should examine in particular:

- all alternative locations with least disturbing effects on the De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve and its surroundings;
- all flight routes and heights and their risk of disturbing the fauna making use of the reserve and its surroundings as well as the risk of collision of birds with airplanes;

5.2 Recommendations

Attaches the following recommendations to the renewal:

1. the annual reports must include a specific paragraph on all developments in relation with Lelystad regional airport;
2. the authorities of the surrounding municipalities and the province must be persuaded to decrease external impacts on the reserve by reviewing urbanisation and zoning plans where appropriate;
3. the optimal functioning of the two visitor's centres (Almere and Lelystad) should be ensured by increasing the budget for personnel, particularly with regard to the recruitment of communication experts;
4. the further integration of adjacent green areas such as Hollandse Hout into the reserve management should be completed; priority should be given to rebuilding the railway along a new route to the south of this zone and opening a new railway station at Lelystad-Zuid;
5. the visual impact of the urbanisation in Almere should be further minimised with the aim of a better gradual integration of the city into the open landscape by fully respecting the border and buffer zones of the reserve and by still further lowering the agreed building heights and volumes;
6. the recommendations of the ICMO (International Committee on the management of large herbivores in the De Oostvaardersplassen) report related to the management of the reserve and the further extension of the reserve should be implemented by building a corridor to Horsterwold; all efforts should be concentrated on establishing the De Oostvaarderswold as a multifunctional corridor with combined importance for nature conservation, recreation and water management; the existing windfarms along the future Oostvaarderswold corridor should be reviewed to reduce the risks of bird collisions and make it appear as "wild" as possible; new developments, infrastructures and investments in the future corridor zone other than those related to its specific ecological functions should be avoided; future ecological interconnection potential should be maximised by constructing wildlife crossings and tunnels where necessary.

6. HAVE CONDITIONS BEEN MET WITH, HAVE RECOMMENDATIONS SUFFICIENTLY BEEN TAKEN CARE OF?

6.1 Conditions, 2009

Condition 1. With regard to new information received concerning the development of the Lelystad regional airport, despite the condition attached to the award in 1999, any development of the airport must not have any negative impact on the reserve; this is to be confirmed once the full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) procedure, including public consultation, has been finalised, and this should examine in particular:

- all alternative locations with least disturbing effects on the De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve and its surroundings;

- all flight routes and heights and their risk of disturbing the fauna making use of the reserve and its surroundings as well as the risk of collision of birds with airplanes.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2014:

For as far as the development of Lelystad airport is concerned, at this moment there still has no final decision been made about the flight paths of the aircraft. The expansion of the airport itself will take place. For as far as the proposed routes for ascending and descending aircraft the final routes are most likely to remain away from the Nature Reserve, mainly due to disturbance and because of the risk of mid-air collisions with birds.

The conclusions in the Environmental Impact Assessment show that for the chosen variant no significant disturbance of birds in the Oostvaardersplassen is to be expected. When there would nevertheless be opted for another route across the Oostvaardersplassen, then an appropriate assessment has to be made.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2015:

No changes compared to 2014.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2016:

Last year the flying-routes have been established respecting the Natura 2000 requirements. That means that airplanes fly only at high altitudes over the Oostvaardersplassen and that the upward and downward movements occur outside the Nature Reserve.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2017:

The flight paths were determined in 2016, with due observance of the Natura2000 requirements, i.e. that flights above the Oostvaardersplassen reserve will only be at a high altitude, and that ascending and descending flight movements will not take place above the Nature Reserve. Compared to last year, no changes have been made here.

Expert observations and comments:

Despite the negative report of Luchtverkeersleiding Nederland in 2009 on the suitability of Lelystad Airport (LA), a governmental decision was nonetheless taken to select this location between two relatively large municipalities (Almere and Lelystad), with the prime aim to decrease pressure on the International airport of Schiphol. Lelystad Airport is planned to open for tourist flights in 2020 (see <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/luchtvaart/ontwikkeling-lelystad-airport>). Nonetheless, Lelystad Airport is very close to the eastern borders of the present Nature Reserve OVP (shortest distance between the area of LA and the eastern border of the Nature Reserve is 5,5 km; if the concept National Park Oostvaardersplassen (see OVP Annual reports of 2014 under 'Changes in boundaries') and the Plan of a New ((Commissie Realisatie Natuurverkiezingen, 2018)) National Park Nieuw Land see OVP Annual report 2017 under 'Changes in boundaries') would be realized the distance between LA and National Park would only be 3km; this is actually already the case, since the Oostvaardersveld and Hollandsehout are already included within the boundaries of the OVP Nature Reserve, and hence the EDPA). Based on their literature study, de Molenaar & Ottburg (2009), conclude that a flight height of 3000 ft. is subject to the so-called 'zorgplicht'. In relation to the conservation goals of OVP as far as birds are concerned, they nonetheless conclude that they do not expect a significant effect on critical breeding birds (Spoonbill) and possibly also no negative effects on critical non-breeding birds in OVP. Whether bird movements to and from the OVP are a potential danger for air traffic itself remains an open question.

It is of the utmost importance that the flight paths as they seem to have been determined in 2016 (see above in Oostvaardersplassen annual report 2017) remain respected in the future, also when LA will be expanded for larger planes and intercontinental flights.

There's severe local doubt among people living in the area on the choice of the LA location, with large concern on the disturbance for local inhabitants and wildlife, on the potential mutual interaction with birds and air traffic, on the possible intention of the government to allow more air traffic at LA on the longer run, also with larger planes than the presently foreseen smaller planes for European tourist flights (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yoDo5i18FMY&feature=youtu.be>).

6.2 Recommendations, 2009

Recommendation 1

The annual reports must include a specific paragraph on all developments in relation with Lelystad regional airport (this recommendation is more or less repetitive on the above-mentioned condition).

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2014:

For as far as the development of Lelystad airport is concerned, at this moment there still has no final decision been made about the flight paths of the aircraft. The expansion of the airport itself will take place. For as far as the proposed routes for ascending and descending aircraft, the final routes are most likely to remain away from the Nature Reserve, mainly due to disturbance risk and because of the risk of midair collisions with birds.

The conclusions in the Environmental Impact Assessment show that for the chosen variant no significant disturbance of birds in the Oostvaardersplassen is to be expected. When there would nevertheless be opted for another route across the Oostvaardersplassen, then an appropriate assessment has to be made.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2015:

No further developments as compared to the reported situation in 2014.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2016:

Around Lelystad airport developments are in full swing. An exit from the Larserweg is laid out towards the airport. Staatsbosbeheer is involved in the construction of the exit and delivers sand for the construction of the road.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2017:

The developments relating to Lelystad Airport are fully under way. An exit will be built from Larserweg towards the Airport. Staatsbosbeheer is participating in the construction of this exit and supplies sand for the construction of the road. The opening is scheduled for 2019.

Expert observations and comments:

The recommendation has been met with, according to the reporting in all of the OVP annual reports. Serious concerns remain though considering the fulfilment of the condition given in the EDPA renewal in 2009 (see above).

Recommendation 2

The authorities of the surrounding municipalities and the province must be persuaded to decrease external impacts on the reserve by reviewing urbanisation and zoning plans where appropriate.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2014:

There are regular meetings between the municipalities of Lelystad, Almere, and the province of Flevoland and Staatsbosbeheer at several levels to ensure a proper and well balanced development of the near vicinity of the Oostvaardersplassen, also in regard with Natura 2000. There is a development-programme New Nature for the province of Flevoland that supports the reserve OVP.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2015:

There are regular meeting between the municipalities of Lelystad, Almere, and the province of Flevoland and Staatsbosbeheer at several levels to ensure a proper and well balanced development of the near vicinity of the Oostvaardersplassen, also in regard with Natura 2000. These contacts have been intensified, also because of the fact there is the wish to give the Oostvaardersplassen and its surrounding woodlands the status of National Park

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2016:

The contacts with the Municipalities of Lelystad and Almere, and the province of Flevoland have been intensified thanks to the common aspiration that the OVP should be a part of a New National Park "Nieuw land". This means that the boundaries of the Oostvaardersplassen shift towards the urban areas, creating a buffer zone around the central part of the OVP. There will come "ports" to Lelystad and Almere-city to optimize the accessibility of the area. In the edge zones possibilities for leisure are created, with which the recreational pressure to the central part of the OVP can be limited.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2017:

In 2017, the Municipality of Lelystad and the Municipality of Almere continued to work on the 'gates' on the Lelystad and Almere sides of the Natura2000 area as part of the development of a National Park. As already indicated in the 2016 report, this concerns the development of (peripheral) zones in which a qualitative improvement is made in terms of recreation and nature experience. This zoning makes it possible to limit recreational pressure on the core area of the OVP and to stop urban development.

Expert observations and comments:

In August 2018, the original Visitor's Centre at the Kitsweg in Lelystad and the new Visitor's Centre De Oostvaarders in Almere were visited. The visitor's centre De Oostvaarders at the Almeersepoort is a fine example of a brand new educational centre with beautiful observation facilities and exhibition and education possibilities. At the centre short but inspiring talks with local representatives of the municipality of Almere (Liesbeth Bronkhorst and Ton Eggenhuizen), and local publications (e.g. Genootschap het Levende Huis 2006; te Raa 2013) showed the good cooperation and interaction of SBB with the local authorities.

Also, SBB has many flyers, booklets, books, a very update website and other educational material available, showing the great effort the organisation puts into informing, attracting and convincing the eco-tourist and non-eco-tourist of the values of the OVP, its biodiversity and its nature management. From within the Nature Reserve the visitor's centre can be seen very well; you might consider this as a certain visual disturbance, but given the integration in the dike and forest in the background, this disturbance level remains acceptably low.

A quick visit was paid to the Kotterbos in the south of the area. Although presently hardly of great biodiversity value, the presence of this type of forest is a good addition to the buffer capacity of the core area of OVP. Further attention for inter-municipality cooperation and assurance of sufficient buffer zones around the core area of the OVP remains a recommendation.



The Visitor's centre De Oostvaarders in Almere, at the western border (the Almeersepoort) of the Nature Reserve Oostvaardersplassen

Recommendation 3

The optimal functioning of the two visitor's centres (Almere and Lelystad) should be ensured by increasing the budget for personnel, particularly with regard to the recruitment of communication experts.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2014:

Last year a begin has been made with using both centres as a place where the public can meet the

manager (warden) of the reserve. Also, there is a new manager at the centre in Almere who has new ideas about cooperation and developing activities around, and if possible, within the reserve. All being conducted by Staatsbosbeheer. Within Staatsbosbeheer there has been a, nearly finished, reorganisation for staff. During this process in the centre at Lelystad there has been an increase of staff with 1.5 FTE.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2015:

As part of the reorganisation mentioned in the OVP annual report 2014, the staff for the province of Flevoland has also been upgraded. As a part of this upgrading there are now several staff members appointed to the reserve. So, there is now an ecologist, a landscape architect, a recreational expert and an expert on sociology included in the staff. Also, the Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve, including the surrounding woodlands, has become an independent management unit. This means that there now is a separation between the Horsterwold near Zeewolde, (what used to be a part of the total Oostvaardersland area, and the remaining Oostvaardersplassen. Here there has also been a change in management in the way that now the Oostvaardersplassen has its own manager for the complete area. This manager is strictly responsible for the management of this area, now referred to as Oostvaardersplassen area.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2016:

No changes from last year. Administration and management of the Visiting centres are unchanged.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2017:

In the context of the gate development on the Almere side, investments will be made in 'The Oostvaarders' Nature Experience Centre in the coming years. From 2018 onwards, Staatsbosbeheer will have a more physical presence in the Centre enabling it to offer activity programmes and carry out on-site management. In the operating budget for the Almere Gate, funds have been set aside to carry out management and programming on a multiannual basis and resources are earmarked to attract 2 additional staff (management and communication).

Expert observations and comments:

For comments on the visitor's centres, see comments under recommendation 2. During the visit, it appeared that staffing on management and other issues suffices. It's an interesting approach to have a diversified staff as far as expertise is concerned, and to have someone responsible for ecology (on monitoring), landscape, recreation and even sociology, respectively.

At the Kitsweg location a brand new management office is constructed, that should ensure good management facilities in the near future. It could also be noted that quite a lot of volunteers are doing a great job for maintaining and promoting the Nature Reserve. This is very much needed, given the up to national involvement of the public, also public that is actually not that much interested in nature and biodiversity as such. Hence, constant attention must be given to engaging, convincing and informing a broad audience, in order to have an as large as possible societal support, awareness and involvement. There's hardly any Nature Reserve area in Europe that needs this societal support more than the OVP, given the on-going and subjective (irrational) discussions on animal welfare (e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9VuLM4LLJOb>).

Recommendation 4

The further integration of adjacent green areas such as Hollandse Hout into the reserve management should be completed; priority should be given to rebuilding the railway along a new route to the south of this zone and opening a new railway station at Lelystad-Zuid.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2014:

Recently the connection between the adjacent areas (Oostvaardersveld and Kotterbos) was realised. Visitors can now enter the Oostvaardersveld through a tunnel from the Oostvaardersplassen. Deer can also use this tunnel, just as it can also use a passage underneath the railroad to the Kotterbos. Also, the connection with the Hollandse Hout looks promising for deer. It is not yet a fact but perhaps in the near future. A new railway and railway station is not within the responsibilities of Staatsbosbeheer.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2015:

Recently the connection between the adjacent areas (Oostvaardersveld and Kotterbos) has become a fact. Visitors can now enter the Oostvaardersveld through a tunnel from the Oostvaardersplassen. Deer

can also use this tunnel, just as it now can use a passage underneath the railroad to the Kotterbos. Also, the connection with the Hollandse Hout for deer will be a fact. Construction of fences and other necessary gates etc. is now being done.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2016:

The management plan for the “Hollandse Hout” was established. The introduction of red deer in the Hollandse Hout is possible next year. This year a start has been made with the construction of a rift in the Hollandse Hout to increase the attractiveness and variety of vegetation types in the forest area. The further integration of the Kotterbos and Oostvaardersbos as components of the OVP is currently underway. These areas (like the Hollandsehout) will become a gateway for the future National Park. The railway line between Almere and Lelystad this year has been voted in a public election as the most beautiful railway route in the Netherlands.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2017:

The integration of the core area with the woodland shell (in this case Hollandse Hout) was further developed in 2017. The connection for red deer between Oostvaardersveld and Hollandse Hout has been realised, but has not yet been opened due to construction work on the gully and the frequent transport of sand from the area. In the summer of 2017, the first red deer reached the Oostvaardersveld through a tunnel underneath the railway line. A number of does are permanently present in the area.

The ambitions for urban development for De Warande area (Lelystad) have been scaled down, making the development of a Lelystad-Zuid station uncertain. As part of the development of the gate area in Hollandse Hout, thoughts are given to improving the accessibility of this area.

Expert observations and comments:

A short visit was organized to the southern part of the Hollandse Hout area, the Oostvaardersbos. Some nature restoration projects were visited. Given the annual reports it seems that recommendation 4 has been met with. Further follow-up and developments of the Hollandse Hout region should be maintained. The added value of a railway station Lelystad-Zuid is of less importance for the Nature Reserve, although it might give additional opportunities for less mobile people to visit the Nature Reserve.

Recommendation 5

The visual impact of the urbanisation in Almere should be further minimised with the aim of a better gradual integration of the city into the open landscape by fully respecting the border and buffer zones of the reserve and by still further lowering the agreed building heights and volumes.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2014:

There are regular meetings between the municipalities of Lelystad, Almere, and the province of Flevoland and Staatsbosbeheer at several levels to ensure a proper and well balanced development of the near vicinity of the Oostvaardersplassen, also in regard with Natura 2000. There is a development-programme New Nature for the province of Flevoland that supports the OVP Nature Reserve.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2015:

See recommendation 2. Because of the fact there is the wish to include the Oostvaardersplassen area into a National park, but on the other hand to minimize the impact of this development on the core of the Oostvaardersplassen as much as possible, while at the other hand this will mean the numbers of visitors will increase, an overall landscape plan is being made. In this plan there will be room for natural processes, while at the other hand, the public will be allowed to see more of the area. This will be done by creating new observation points, and creating new possibilities for the public to visit the area. Guideline in these developments are the N2000 legislations and animal welfare. Most of the development will take place in the newly added woodlands. One thing what will be done next year, is the mining of sand in the Hollandse Hout woodland. Because of this mining it will be possible to create a creek in the forest of some 24 hectares. In this way the forest will become much more attractive for birds and wild live, it will contribute to the achievement of the N2000 goals, and it will increase the possibilities for the public to experience more. Also, the Oostvaardersveld is now finished with more trails, including trails for people who are depending on wheelchairs.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2016:

See also recommendation 4. In the previous annual report, the initiated changes and developments are

described for the edge zones. This year the plans are further developed, and a start has been made in Hollandse Hout with the construction of ponds, where sand and clay is extracted. From the viewpoint of the port idea to Lelystad and Almere, plans have been developed for a natural buffer between the cities and the core land of the OVP. Visitors in the border areas should be able to experience the Oostvaardersplassen nature. Next year we expect to book the first results in the context of this development.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2017:

In the planning around the gate area on the Almere side, the scenic visual effects of urban development along the peripheral zone are explicitly considered. Urban development in the immediate vicinity of Oostvaardersbos and Kotterbos will continue to be low, also in the future.

Expert observations and comments:

There was not paid special attention to this recommendation during the visit. From a central point in the core area of the OVP, it can be concluded though that not much visual disturbance by the ‘skyline’ of Almere can be noticed anymore, apart from the Visitor’s centre De Oostvaarders itself (see earlier under recommendation 2).



Recommendation 6

The recommendations of the ICMO (International Committee on the management of large herbivores in the De Oostvaardersplassen) report related to the management of the reserve and the further extension of the reserve should be implemented by building a corridor to Horsterwold; all efforts should be concentrated on establishing the De Oostvaarderswold as a multifunctional corridor with combined importance for nature conservation, recreation and water management; the existing windfarms along the future Oostvaarderswold corridor should be reviewed to reduce the risks of bird collisions and make it appear as “wild” as possible; new developments, infrastructures and investments in the future corridor zone other than those related to its specific ecological functions should be avoided; future ecological interconnection potential should be maximised by constructing wildlife crossings and tunnels where necessary.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2014:

This year the management advisory board, (BAC) installed by the former secretary of State, will give their opinion in their final report. The advice will be included in the new management plan according to Natura 2000. The management plan for the Natura 2000 appointment for the Oostvaardersplassen

has now gone public. Early next year the outcome of the public poll will be known, and hopefully, the plan can start. For as far as the Oostvaarderswold project is concerned, this BAC is finally stopped due to costs and change of views by the ministry.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2015:

Earlier this year the former BAC has presented its final report. As a result, the State Secretary has accepted this report, and it is now used as a part of the N 2000 management plan. During this process, in parliament there has been a hearing in which the State Secretary has been asked to hand over the responsibility for the management issues, regarding animal welfare to the province. The State Secretary has agreed with this. Now it is up to the province to see what their influence is in this matter and how they will be handling accordingly. The Natura 2000 management plan is nearly gone through all the procedures. It is now open for the last round of comments. As soon as this round has ended in 6 weeks' time from now, the implementation can start.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2016:

The Natura 2000 management plan for the OVP has been established this year and is leading the management and development measures in the central part and the edge zones. On 26th of October, the Provincial Council approved the transfer of responsibility for the "well-being of large herbivores" from the national to the provincial government. We are now working on a description of what this change in responsibility means for the provincial government. Early next year, it becomes clear what this policy and review on this policy will become.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2017:

The year 2017 was dominated by the planning for the implementation of the Natura2000 management measures for the marshland and grassy areas of Oostvaardersplassen. The main tasks focused on the regeneration of reed by means of a reset of the marsh, the construction of fish ladders allowing the migration of sticklebacks to the area, and the construction of ponds with ungrazed islands in the dry part of Oostvaardersplassen. The planning of a number of other tasks has also been completed: the softening of transitions between marshland, the grassy area and the wooded shell, and the creation of shelters for the large grazers. A start will be made in the autumn of 2018 with the implementation of the Natura2000 measures in the marshland area.

In the autumn of 2017, work continued on the shelter tasks for Oostvaardersbos, Kotterbos and De Driehoek. Trees have been planted with individual tree protection and, as in previous years, 'corrals' (an enclosed, fenced-off area) have been used in the woodland areas to protect young plants from damage by large grazers.

Expert observations and comments:

Very regrettably, the plan to create a corridor between the Horsterwold with the creation of the Oostvaarderswold, has been abandoned during the period since the last renewal in 2009. This means that the original "Minimal Intervention Ecosystem Approach" had to be abandoned too, and replaced by a management approach entirely in function of more or less deterministic N2000 goals (Kuil et al. 2015). I consider this as a major missed chance to create/maintain a unique almost entirely process driven approach, that would long be exemplary for future management approaches all over Europe (e.g. rewilding initiatives in European areas with large agricultural land abandonment situations (Perreira & Navarro 2015). Additionally, extra management measures were (had to be??) taken in addition to the N2000 management plan (Kuil et al. 2015), following large public protest concerning animal welfare (van Geel et al. 2017). This in turn was strongly contested in Dutch society (e.g. <https://tvblik.nl/argos-tv-medialogica/oostvaardersplassen-van-droom-tot-nachtmerrie>).

SBB regularly publishes monthly updates of the management and management results (e.g. SBB 2019), indicating the hugely intensified human interference in the OVP ecosystem. As such publishing management reports and results regularly is important to create and maintain social acceptance of what is happening in the Nature Reserve, but on the other hand its very indicative of the 180% turn in management approach. There are several indications that the new management is not anymore within the philosophy and concrete management measures and goals of the N2000 management plan, that was accepted in 2015 (Kuil et al. 2015). Several measures, not in the least shooting of large numbers of large herbivores, interferes with the N2000 management plan and its goals.

Conditional for the renewal of the EDPA is that the present intensive management is not in conflict

with the accepted and implemented N2000 management plan (Kuil et al. 2015) and the N2000 goals that were defined when registering the OVP Nature Reserve as a N2000 site.

It remains an open question whether not meeting recommendation 6 with very far-reaching management consequences are a reason for withdrawal of the EDPA classification. This is up to the Group of Specialists, and finally the Committee of Ministers.

6.3 Changes in site management

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2015:

Last year there has been no real changes to the site itself. However, the writing and bringing out the Natura 2000-plan has been the main topic for this year. Some of the things that have been done this year was the counting of the large herbivores in the Oostvaardersplassen. This counting is done twice a year, (as advised by ICMO2). In spring this is carried out from ground stations, with staff and volunteers, also including members of a local birding society. Later in the year it is done by helicopter (as suggested by ICMO2). During the second counting there also were members of the local birding society present to look at the impact this method of counting has on birdlife. The counting by helicopter is a costly affair. As said, the staff for our information centre has increased by 1.5 FTE. Since the premiere of the film “the Nieuwe Wildernis” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_PochU5VYY) in the cinema’s, in August 2014, the number of visitors to the reserve has tripled, or at some moments in the weekends even quadrupled. This means together with the local community we have to solve the problem of parking capacity for our visitors. There are moments that over 250 cars have to find a parking place. At this moment planning we are looking for a change in the management building including its surrounding and the parking space.

Because of the fact the adjacent area, the Oostvaardersveld, now has been connected with the Oostvaardersplassen and there are several trails and footpaths and deer also will shortly get access to this area, there is need to update the management plan especially for this area. This plan will be made with the cooperation of several external stakeholders.

Oostvaardersplassen annual report comments 2016:

In effect the adjacent woodlands, Oostvaardersveld, Hollandse Hout and Kotterbos are added to the reserve, now being part of the Oostvaardersplassen area. There is so far no change in the area itself, but as soon as the Natura 2000 management plan is approved of and put in place, there will be several changes made to the area to meet up with the requirements of Natura 2000. Some of the things that were done this year was the counting of the large herbivores in the Oostvaardersplassen. This counting is done twice a year, (as advised by ICMO2). In spring this is done from ground stations, with staff and volunteers, also including members of a local birding society. Later in the year it is done by helicopter (as suggested by ICMO2). During the second count there also are members of the local birding society present to witness about the impact this method of counting has on the birdlife. It remains to be seen how effective this way of counting is, and how we will proceed in the coming years. As specially the counting by helicopter is a costly affair. Since the premiere of the film “the Nieuwe Wildernis” in the cinema’s august last year, the number of visitors has tripled, or at some moments in the weekends even quadrupled. This means there now is a problem with parking for our visitors. There are now moments when there are over 250 cars here that need to park, but cannot find a place. At this moment planning is done about changing the management building including its surrounding and also the parking space.

Because of the fact the adjacent area, the Oostvaardersveld, now has been connected with the Oostvaardersplassen and there are several hides and footpaths and deer also will shortly get access to this area, there now is a management plan especially for this area. This plan has been made with the cooperation of several external parties. Also, for the Hollandse Hout area a management plan is in development, accordingly to the plan of the Oostvaardersveld. A start is also made with a plan for the Oostvaardersbos. Finally, these plans will have to come together in one plan for the management of the outer skirt of the whole Oostvaardersplassen area. This plan will help to make decisions about how to deal with issues concerning the use of the area easier.

This year, the Natura 2000 management plan is adopted. Next years the implementation of the management measures will follow. For the OVP, the key tasks are:

- Sufficient moulting areas and resting areas for waterfowl
- Restoration of large areas / zones broad reed beds, including water reed, by restoring natural level dynamics and preventing dehydration for reed birds
- Pee-breed situations for wigeon and breeding birds

For a summary of the tasks and objectives and the full management, see the following link: <http://www.synbiosys.alterra.nl/natura2000/documenten/gebieden/078/beheerplan/ontwerp%20natura%202000-beheerplan%20oostvaardersplassen.pdf>

Visitor numbers at the Outdoor Centre are growing. We received about 130,000 visitors in this centre. This puts pressure on the centre and the parking places around the area (Almere and Kitsweg). The number of parking spaces at the visiting centre at the Kitsweg has increased from 40 to 200, but this number seems to be not enough in busy weekends. The Oostvaardersveld has been discovered by the visitor. This area is open, and visitors can come face to face with a herd of Konik horses. In 2014, there is a tunnel made under the railway to open up the area for large grazers. This exchange is only sporadically used by the animals. Last year, a number of deer visited the new area, but they returned to the core area.

For the edge zones Hollandse Hout, Oostvaardersveld, Kotterbos and Oostvaardersbos forest management plans are or will be written. These management plans should be an integral part of the plan for the border zones and Oostvaardersplassen as a whole. This recreational forest areas are connected with the central part and should provide shelter to the large herbivores.

In October of this year an intention agreement between the Province of Flevoland and Staatsbosbeheer has been made for the development of an area between the Trekweg and A6. The objective is to create a kind of a showcase along the A6 for experiencing the Oostvaardersplassen feeling. It is designed as a permanent foraging-area for harrier and accessible for recreation.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2017:

The plans for the Natura2000 management measures were developed further in 2017. Considerable time and effort will continue to be put into the further development and implementation plans for these measures in the coming year, and the implementation of the measures in the marshland area is likely to start by the end of 2018.



Implementation plans were also developed and partially implemented for a number of other tasks last year.

1. Involvement of the peripheral zones (Hollandse Hout, Kotterbos and Oostvaardersbos) in the core

area and making these zones more experiential (partly in relation to the development of the Nieuw Land National Park);

2. Enhancing the visual perception of the landscape;
3. Greater involvement of society in Oostvaardersplassen;
4. Greater involvement of science and higher education in Oostvaardersplassen.

1. The ambition to have Oostvaardersplassen to become part of a new Nieuw Land National Park was given further shape in 2017. A master plan for the National Park (with Lepelaarplassen, Markerwadden and Markermeer) is being drawn up and will be submitted next year for the purpose of obtaining National Park status. At the same time, as part of the development of the National Park, we are strengthening the quality of the recreational facilities and infrastructure in the peripheral zones.

An integrated management plan is currently being drawn up which describes the management of both the core area and the peripheral zones.

In the gate areas there is close cooperation with the municipalities of Almere and Lelystad, both as regards the development measures (hardware) and the programming (software). As area partners, they contribute to the financing as does the Province of Flevoland.

2. In combination with Natura2000 and the shelter tasks, resulting from the recommendations of ICMO 2 plans are being drawn up to strengthen the transitions between the marshland zone, the dry section and the periphery of the landscape. The construction of fish ladders, possibly along the railway zone (area between the management road and the rail track) and along the marshland, could be combined with the construction of ponds, inundation areas and un-grazed islands with reed development.

3. In order to strengthen public support for the management of Oostvaardersplassen, a number of initiatives were taken in 2017. In addition to environmental participation and regular consultations with stakeholders, greater efforts were made to use social media to reach and involve a wider public. In addition, a start was made with a series of 'wilderness cafes' facilitating communication with local residents and specific target groups.

4. The scientific and other research in the Oostvaardersplassen area is further shaped by means of a broad research agenda in which various universities and colleges participate. In line with this, education (primary and secondary schools) will also receive more attention in the coming years in the form of specific programmes and activities tailored to the area. A new management building with a field station will be built in 2018. This field station will accommodate scientists for research.

Expert observations and comments:

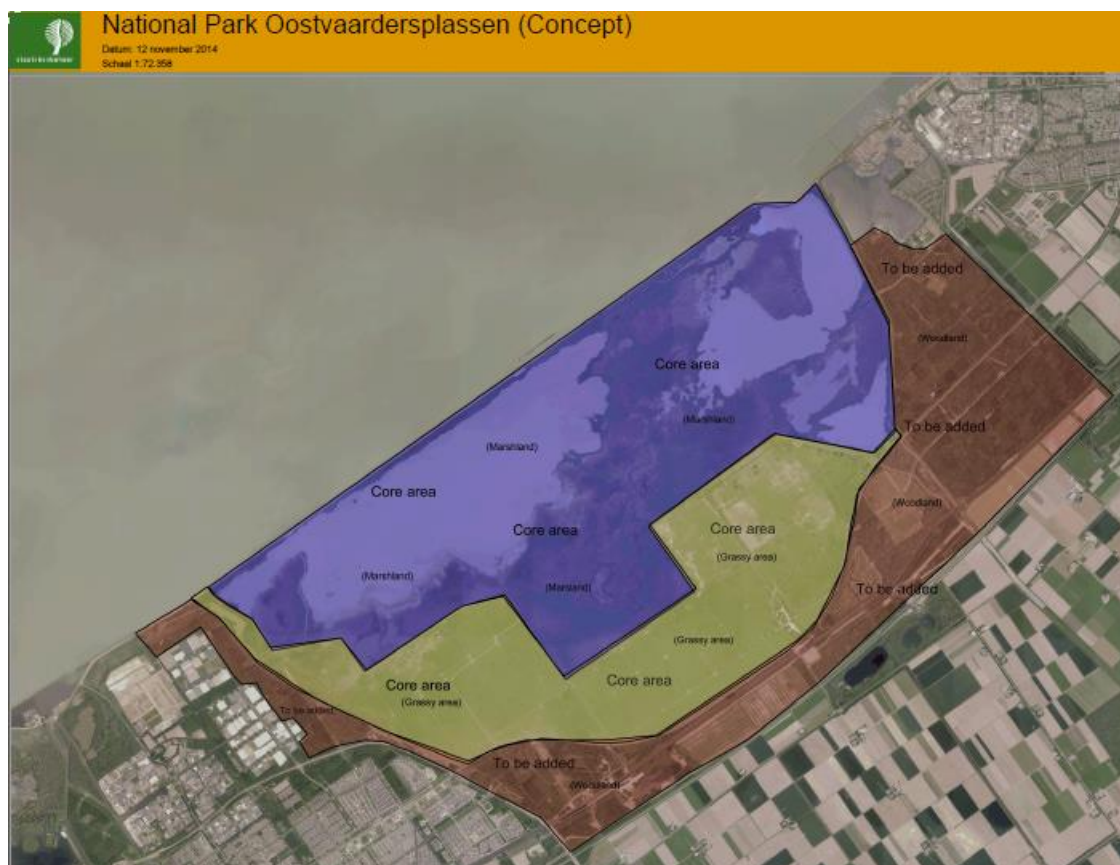
During the visit, indeed the extra actions on creating societal involvement and management support are manifold. Caution has to be advised to maintain tourist and recreational attraction manageable and not in conflict with the general nature values of the area, one of which is the tranquillity of the core area, famous for its avifaunal richness. Creating reasonably large buffer zones at the outskirts of the core area (Kotterbos, Oostvaardersveld, Oostvaardersbos, and Hollandse hout), is largely answering recommendation 4 and 5. At the same time, these areas can have very significant added value to the nature values of the whole area.

6.4 Changes in boundaries of the EDPA

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2014:

There has not been any real change in the boundaries of the reserve itself. However, since this year we prefer to speak of the Oostvaardersplassen in a manner that indicates that the reserve consists of a so called "core area" (the original Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve), and the surrounding areas. This outer layer of the area consists of the following areas: Hollandse Hout, (900 ha) Oostvaardersveld (350 ha), Kotterbos (300 ha), and the Oostvaardersbos (140 ha). All of these areas are more or less directly connected with the reserve itself. At the other [southern] side of the Lage Vaart, a canal that forms the boundary of the area, there is an area of 360 ha of which 110 ha will be redeveloped for more recreational use, combined with foraging area for bird species appointed by Natura 2000. Additionally, a proposal by the province of Flevoland is launched to transfer an area of 110 ha to Staatsbosbeheer, also to be redeveloped and used for recreation and as foraging area. In total, this means that the total area will be increased to 7760 ha. The centre than can remain a protected area

with its special values, while the surrounding 2160 ha will be developed for recreational activities. Local politics have developed a plan to appoint the Oostvaardersplassen as a new National Park. This would be by including the earlier mentioned core area and its surrounding areas. (see map)



The concept National Park Oostvaardersplassen.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2015:

No changes as compared to the annual report 2014.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2016:

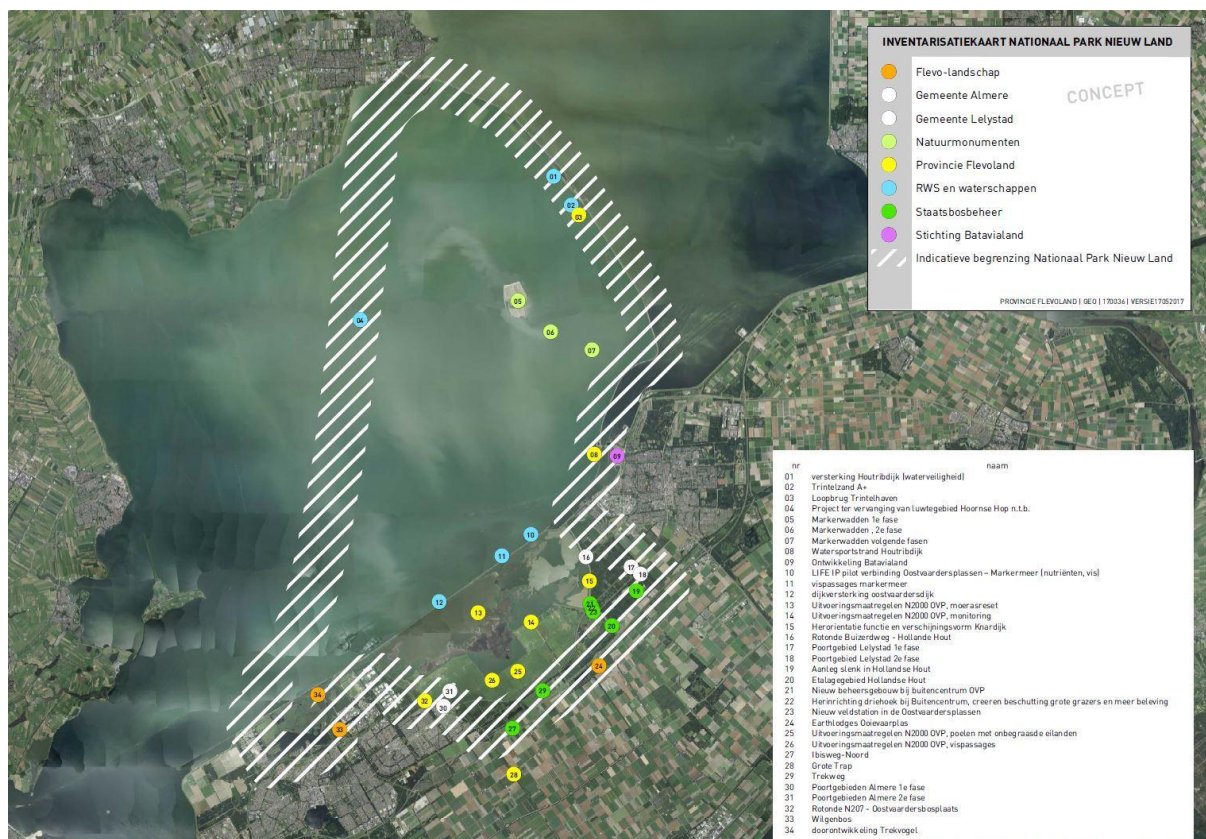
There have been no real boundary changes in 2016. The process of integrating the edge zones and the core of the OVP becomes more and more visible. See also the comments made in the report for 2014 and 2015 (see map above). Because of the formation of a National Park [called Nieuw Land], where the OVP is part of a larger unit with the Marker lake, Marker Wadden and Lepelaarsplassen, some discussions and developments will be part of the agenda. The main tasks for the OVP are:

- Preservation of identity, including cooperation with other land management organizations?
- How can areas reinforce each other?
- How to deal with an expected increase of (foreign) visitors?
- Issues such as zoning in the edge zones?
- How to shape scientific research and education?

Important is to indicate that the Marker Wadden and Marker lake are still in development the coming years and that the focus for the visitor will remain on the Oostvaardersplassen.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2017:

There were no boundary changes last year. With the development of the National Park [Nieuw Land], cross-border initiatives will be developed, and ecological and recreational connections will be made with the adjacent Nature Reserves such as Lepelaarsplassen, Markermeer and Marker Wadden. In cooperation with the various regional parties (mainly the Municipality of Almere, the Municipality of Lelystad and the Province of Flevoland) the challenge is to match ambitions and to pace. In the second half of 2017, the Province of Flevoland took more decisive control of this coordination.



The Nieuw Land National Park concept

Expert observations and comments:

During the visit in August 2018, a lot of attention was paid to the plans to create a New National Park 'Nieuw Land', that includes large parts of the former IJsselmeer (Lepelaarplassen, Markermeer and Marker Wadden). The OVP Nature Reserve would be a relatively small part (77,6 km², including all additional buffer zones at the northern, eastern and southern edges of the 56 km² large core area of the OVP) of this approximately 290 km² large National Park, strongly dominated by open fresh water (Witsen 2018). Although the initiative to create such a large National Park is very much welcomed, it is of less concern when judging the situation of the OVP Nature Reserve and the renewal of its EDPA. Nonetheless, it may be expected that some positive effects will result from this initiative for the OVP, but these are of less importance for judging the fulfilment of conditions and recommendations of the OVP.

Given this new situation, Dutch authorities might best consider to apply for an EDPA for the Nieuw Land National Park. This would make this appraisal of the EDPA of the OVP Nature Reserve superfluous, since an entirely new situation would be created.

6.5 Other information reported by SBB that is not included in the conditions, recommendations, management and boundaries issues

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2014:

This year a new start has been made in the participation of the Migratory Birds for People project. For several reasons, the participation in this project was put on hold, but now it has been renewed. This is a project between the visitor centres along the flight way of migratory birds in Europe.

The number of tours and visits to the area has increased greatly since the film 'De Nieuwe Wildernis' (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_PochU5VYY) has been shown in cinemas. 700.000 people saw the movie, it won several awards. At this moment there are ideas to release it also in Germany next year. It has had the international attention of several countries, like Belgium, France, Japan, the U.K. It also has been shown on the international flights from the KLM between Amsterdam and New York.

This year the White-tailed Eagle did nest again in the Oostvaardersplassen, this time with three young, the first time ever recorded in the Netherlands.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2015:

This year a new start has been made in the participation of the Migratory Birds for People project. For several reasons, the participation in this project was put on hold, but it has now been renewed. This is a project between the visitor centres along the flight way of migratory birds in Europe. This project has been intensified, and at this moment we are looking into the possibilities of looking for Life Funding in order to improve communication about this network.

Since last year the number of tours and visits to the area had increased greatly since the film has been shown in the cinema's, now it is clear that this hype is over. The release in Germany did not have a significant effect. Numbers have decreased, although the attention has not. Especially students and scientific universities are showing a lot of interest in what the Oostvaardersplassen are about. This interest is national, but also international. Also a number of reports have been written for several papers. Now, with N2000 legislation in place, there will be a closer look at the kind of activities and the number of activities that can be held in the Oostvaardersplassen.

The total number of visitors for the complete area is close to 1,000,000 visitors. For the information centre the number is close to 85,000 visitors from January until October. The total number of tours etc. is nearly 400, although it must be said there has been another system of registering numbers. This means some groups have not been included into this count. Within soon we will see how the counting can be done more efficiently and accurately.

Although the White-tailed Eagle is still present in the area it is going to be an exciting year because of the fact that their nest has fallen out of the trees this year, because of the summer storm this year. So far we have not seen a new nest, but we are confident it will come.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2016:

In November of this year's participation in the project Migratory Birds for People has resumed. the thread has picked up again to connect the visitor centres in Europe with each other by the flight paths of migratory birds. Participation in the Life project application, which aims to remove barriers through communication for migratory birds, is still considered.

The task for the Oostvaardersplassen for the coming years will be to develop the Natura 2000 management plan and its effects on the target species (31 bird species). Point 3 indicates already what "challenges" we see. One of the main challenges will be to connect the swamp part with the dry, grassy, lower part of the core area. There will be more space given to scientific research on these interventions and their effects. (Inter) national universities and high schools are invited to contribute. In 2016 the development of the Oostvaardersplassen as part of a larger National Park, with the Lepelaarplassen, Marker Wadden and Markermeer has given a clear direction. There has been made a joint bid book (with Natuurmonumenten, Flevolandschap, City of Almere, Lelystad City and the Province of Flevoland) for the nomination of a world class National Park (Commissie Realisatie Natuurverkiezingen 2018). In this public election National Park Nieuw Land did not get a price. The partners agreed to continue the process to found a National Park.

Next year, the plans will be developed further, and we will, especially in the border areas see the first results of these developments in recreational facilities, educational programs and the elaboration of the 'land ports.

The White-tailed eagle is doing well. Last October there were at the same time six birds observed in the area. 2016 is known as the 10th year of consecutive breeding success.

Oostvaardersplassen Annual report comments 2017:

Transfer of responsibility for animal welfare from Government to Province

In December 2016, the responsibility for the welfare of the large grazers was transferred from the State to the Province of Flevoland. In the coming period, a new policy framework will be prepared which is expected to be completed early 2018. Staatsbosbeheer is involved in the role of administrator.

Integral large grazer management plan

An integrated management plan is currently being prepared for the large grazers for the entire Oostvaardersplassen area (Natura2000 core and surrounding woodland shell). The starting point is that the current early-reactive management in the core area is a well-functioning instrument.

As it has become clear that the Oostvaarderswold corridor (between Oostvaardersplassen and Horsterwold) will not be realised, the options for a sustainable shelter must be sought in the peripheral zones and the core area. In this context, in addition to the construction of 'corrals with young plants', a start was made in the autumn of 2017 on the planting of trees with individual tree protection in Oostvaarderbos, Kotterbos and De Driehoek.

Expert observations and comments:

No expert observations or comments

7. EXPERT ADVICE ON REMAINING AND ADDITIONAL CONDITIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Remaining conditions

Lelystad Airport (LA) is planned to open for tourist flights in 2020 (the official Dutch governmental website <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/luchtvaart/ontwikkeling-lelystad-airport> states: “In 2020, Lelystad Airport will be open for holiday flights within Europe and other destinations around the Mediterranean Sea. Lelystad Airport, together with Eindhoven Airport, takes over part of the air traffic from Schiphol. This creates space for business travel and intercontinental flights at Schiphol that are of great importance for the competitive position of the Netherlands and thus for our prosperity”.

The on-going local up to national discussions on the destination of Lelystad Airport (LA) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yoDo5i18FMY&feature=youtu.be>) is a major concern for the nature values of the Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve (OVP-NR), and hence for the renewal of the EDPA.

A condition for renewal would be that the flight paths as they seem to have been determined in 2016 do not include flight paths directly above the OVP NR, also when LA will eventually be expanded for larger planes and intercontinental flights in the future.

As soon as LA starts with its tourist flight programme (foreseen in 2020), monitoring of the effects of the flight activities at LA on bird activity, N2000 goals, recreational interest and general tranquillity of the core area and buffer zones of the OVP NR, is strongly recommended. Negative effects registered in the monitoring programme and that cannot be remediated can lead to withdrawal of the EDPA.

Condition 1 in short:

In the context of the development of the Lelystad airport ensure that flight paths **exclude in all cases overflights of the Oostvaarderplassen Nature Reserve and its surrounding buffer zones**. Obviously, in case the airport is expanded for larger planes and intercontinental flights in the future, the same condition holds.

7.2 New conditions

The shift from a Minimal Intervention Ecosystem Approach (MIEA) to a management approach entirely in function of more or less deterministic nature goals (N2000, mainly breeding and non-breeding bird species) followed by a management adjustment to cope with public protest concerning animal welfare is regretted. The last renewal of the EDPA in 2009 still departed from this approach, assuming that a corridor to the Horsterwold via a not yet existing corridor would be created (recommendation 6 of 2009). The MIEA was rather unique for the OVP NR, and was largely (certainly not entirely) respected in the N2000 management plan (Kuil et al. 2015).

Condition 2, in short: The N2000 management plan (Kuil et al., 2015) should be integrally respected and implemented in order to maintain the top reasons of the original EDPA appraisal, i.e. the large bird diversity and the Minimal Intervention Ecosystem Approach, with as limited as possible human intervention in large herbivore dynamics, but at the same time with great emphasis on an appropriate water dynamics management. Hence, the Van Geel advice (2018) should not be implemented.

7.3 Remaining and new or renewed recommendations

Recommendation 1

Thoroughly monitor the effects of future flight activities at Lelystad Airport on birds, achievement of Natura 2000 goals, recreational impact and interest and general tranquillity of the core area and buffer

zones of the Oostvaarderplassen Nature Reserve.

Recommendation 2

To give the Minimal Intervention Ecosystem Approach optimal chances in its contributions to management goals, the recommendation 6 of the 2009 expert report would best be partly implemented. Therefore, it is recommended that further extension of the reserve through establishing a wide corridor to Horsterwold, with free access of large herbivores to both corridor and Horsterwold would be realized and thrived at.

Recommendation 3

Maintain and further strengthen the cooperation between the management authorities, the surrounding municipalities and the province in order to limit the impacts on the Nature Reserve when reviewing urbanisation and zoning plans and ensure enough buffer zones around the core area of the Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve.

Recommendation 4

In cooperation with all layers of stakeholders (representatives of the local and regional authorities, managing authorities, scientists, NGOs and civil society associations) design a transparent and widely accepted control mechanism of the populations of large herbivore mammals. Keep on raising awareness and keep on informing the public at large about the objectives of such a mechanism, about its direct effect on animal welfare, and about its impact in the long term on the biodiversity of the nature reserve.

Recommendation 5

Following the integration of the edge zones – i.e. Hollandse Hout, Oostvaardersveld, Kotterbos and Oostvaardersbos - into the nature reserve, finalise their management plans and ensure they are consistent with the management of the core area of the nature reserve.

Recommendation 6

Monitor the increase and impact of visitors to avoid any negative impact either on the quality of recreational experience or on the natural values of the Oostvaarderplassen Nature Reserve. Take remedying measures if monitoring results indicate negative effects on the intrinsic values of the NR.

Recommendation 7

Give more visibility to the logo of the European Diploma and raise awareness about its aims and objectives on the website of the nature reserve, through social media, flyers, brochures, website and information panels in the visitor's centres and in the field.

Note for the Council:

This approach would be very much helped if the Council would pay more attention to advertising the network of EDPA's; the Council website, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/bern-convention/european-diploma-for-protected-areas>, is presently limited in that respect. The EDPA sites should be much more profiled as a (the) European **network** of pristine sites with European significance. Initiatives could also be taken to select ecosystems that are relevant at the European level, and then consequently stimulate member states actively to apply for an EDPA when the ecosystems present in those member states are of European importance. The total of areas would ideally be representative of pristine examples of Europe's ecosystems and biodiversity hot spots in all biogeographical regions of Europe.

Recommendation 8

Pursue the reflection about the creation of the National Park Nieuw Land encompassing the Oostvaarderplassen Nature Reserve and envisage applying for the European Diploma for the national park (instead of the Oostvaardersplassen NR).

8. CONCLUSIONS

In general, it can be concluded that the local authorities and managers of the OVP NR did a great job in trying to fulfil the conditions and recommendation put forward at the last renewal (2009). Some of the recommendations remain to be kept in focus (with emphasis on recommendation 6 concerning

expansion towards the Horsterwold), new recommendations concern persevered and new monitoring initiatives. During the visit, I experienced great engagement and effort of the managers and rangers. Initiatives to implement the National Park Nieuw Land are stimulated. A number of the recommendations suggested at the renewal in 2009 remain in focus and monitoring the effects of increased recreational use of the OVP NR is a new recommendation.

Major conditions for renewal of the EDPA is the absolute avoidance of airplane flights over the core area and buffer zones of the EDPA, and respecting and implementation of the Natura 2000 Management plan, ignoring the Van Geel advice on herd management

9. OVERALL ADVICE ON CONDITIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND (CONDITIONAL) RENEWAL

Conditions

1. In the context of the development of the Lelystad airport ensure that the flight paths as determined in 2016 exclude overflights of the Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve. Obviously, in case the airport is expanded for larger planes and intercontinental flights in the future, the same condition holds.
2. The N2000 management plan should be integrally respected and implemented in order to maintain the top reasons of the original EDPA appraisal, i.e. the large bird diversity and the Minimal Intervention Ecosystem Approach, with as limited as possible human intervention in large herbivore dynamics, but at the same time with great emphasis on an appropriate water dynamics management as given in the N2000 management plan. Hence, the Van Geel advice should not be implemented.

Recommendations

1. Thoroughly monitor the effects of future flight activities at Lelystad Airport on birds, achievement of Natura 2000 goals, recreational impact and interest and general tranquillity of the core area and buffer zones of the Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve.
2. To give the Minimal Intervention Ecosystem Approach optimal chances in its contributions to management goals, the recommendation 6 of the 2009 expert report would best be partly implemented, i.e. the further extension of the reserve through establishing a wide corridor to Horsterwold, with free access of large herbivores to both corridor and Horsterwold.
3. Maintain and further strengthen the cooperation between the management authorities, the surrounding municipalities and the province in order to limit the impacts on the Nature Reserve when reviewing urbanisation and zoning plans and ensure enough buffer zones around the core area of the Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve.
4. In cooperation with all layers of stakeholders (representatives of the local and regional authorities, managing authorities, scientists, NGOs and civil society associations) design a transparent and widely accepted control mechanism of the populations of large herbivore mammals. Keep on raising awareness and keep on informing the public at large about the objectives of such a mechanism, about its direct effect on animal welfare, and about its impact in the long term on the biodiversity of the nature reserve.
5. Following the integration of the edge zones – i.e. Hollandse Hout, Oostvaardersveld, Kotterbos and Oostvaardersbos - into the nature reserve, finalise their management plans and ensure they are consistent with the management of the core area of the nature reserve.
6. Monitor the increase and impact of visitors to avoid any negative impact either on the quality of recreational experience or on the natural values of the Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve. Take remediating measures if monitoring results indicate negative effects on the intrinsic values of the NR.
7. Give more visibility to the logo of the European Diploma and raise awareness about its aims and objectives on the website of the nature reserve, through social media, flyers, brochures, website and information panels in the visitor's centres and in the field.

8. Pursue the reflection about the creation of the National Park Nieuw Land encompassing the Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve and envisage applying for the European Diploma for the national park.

Renewal?

The advice is to renew the EDPA for the Oostvaardersplassen NR for another **five years**, during which period both above-mentioned conditions and the 8 recommendations are fulfilled, respectively thoroughly evaluated. If conditions are not met with within five years, serious doubt must be expressed on further prolongation of the EDPA for the Oostvaardersplassen NR.

It is evident that thorough annual reporting on progress made on both conditions and recommendations is necessary and obligatory to allow regular in between evaluations by the group of specialists.

An eventual EDPA-application for the Nieuw Land National Park should be treated independently of the present EDPA, and needs a full appraisal as any other first application demands.

10. REFERENCES

10.1 Cited written references

- Boerma, S., 2018. Nieuw Land in beweging. Oostvaardersplassen. 50 jaar historie in vogelvlucht, 71pp.
- Commissie Realisatie Natuurverkiezingen, 2018. Op weg naar nieuwe Nationale Parken. Eindrapport van de Commissie Realisatie Natuurverkiezing. 32 pp.
- Cornelissen, P., 2017. Large herbivores as a driving force of woodland-grassland cycles The mutual interactions between the population dynamics of large herbivores and vegetation development in a eutrophic wetland. WUR, Wageningen, 151pp.
- Council of Europe, 2009. Resolution CM/ResDip(2009)6 on the renewal of the European Diploma of Protected Areas awarded to the De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve (Netherlands), 2pp.
- Crawley, M.J. 1997. Plant-herbivore dynamics. In: Crawley, M.J. (Ed.). Plant Ecology (2nd ed.). Blackwell Science. Oxford , UK. Pp. 401-474.
- De Molenaar, J.G., Ottburg, F.W.G.A., 2009. Uitbreiding vliegverkeer Lelystad Airport en alternatieve locaties in relatie tot ‘natuurontwikkelingen’ in de regio. Wageningen, Alterra, Alterra-rapport 1925, 97 pp.
- De Snoo, N. (SBB), 2016. Managementplan Oostvaardersplassengebied 2017. Uitwerking en implementatie van ICMO2-matregelen, monitoring en communicatie. 2 pp.
- De Snoo, N. (SBB), 2017. Managementplan Oostvaardersplassengebied 2018. Uitwerking en implementatie van ICMO2-matregelen, monitoring en communicatie. 2 pp.
- Faber, H. Repko, M.J.F., Verschoor, M.H., 2014. Milieueffectrapport Lelystad Airport 2014. Deel 3: Het route-optimalisatieproces. 50 pp.
- Genootschap het Levende Huis, 2006. Boomverhalen. Een kleine geschiedenis van Almere, 117 pp.
- ICMO, 2006. Reconciling Nature and human interests. Report of the International Committee on the Management of large herbivores in the Oostvaardersplassen (ICMO). The Hague/Wageningen, Netherlands. Wageningen UR- WING rapport 018. June 2006. ISBN 9032703528.
- Jans, L., Drost, H.J. 1995. De Oostvaardersplassen, 25 jaar vegetatieonderzoek. Flevovericht nr. 382. Rijkswaterstaat Directie IJsselmeergebied, Lelystad.
- Jørgensen, D., 2015. Rethinking Rewilding. Geoforum 65: 482-488.
- Kuijken, E., 1996. De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve (Lelystad, the Netherlands), application, expert report. 15 pp.

- Kuijken, E., 2003. De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve (Netherlands), renewal of the European Diploma, expert report, 10 pp.
- Kuijken, E., 2009. De Oostvaardersplassen' Nature Reserve (Lelystad, the Netherlands), renewal of the European Diploma, Expert Report, 21pp.
- Kuil, R., Janssen, H., Woudenberg, S., Vera, F., 2015. Natura 2000-beheerplan Oostvaardersplassen (78). 211 pp.
- Lange, R., Margry, K. 1992. Tweede zoogdierinventarisatie in het Oostvaardersplassengebied. Vereniging voor Zoogdierkunde en Zoogdierbescherming. Utrecht.
- Lensink R. 2018. Vormen vliegbewegingen van lokale vogels en trekkende vogels een risico voor het luchtverkeer van en naar Lelystad Airport? Rapport 18-139. Bureau Waardenburg, Culemborg.
- Lensink, R., 2014. Milieueffectrapport Lelystad Airport 2014. Deel 4E. Deelonderzoek beschermde natuurgebieden. Uitbreiding Vliegveld Lelystad; toetsing in het kader van de Natuurbeschermingswet 1998, 124pp.
- Lorimer, J. & Driessen, C., 2013. Wild experiments at the Oostvaardersplassen: Rethinking environmentalism in the Anthropocene. Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers 39(2)
- Luchtverkeersleiding Nederland, 2009. Luchtruim Flevoland 2020: een verkenning van de mogelijkheden. Inventarisatie van mogelijkheden en gevolgen van het accommoderen van 35.000 vliegbewegingen of meer in de provincie Flevoland in 2020. 45pp.
- Ministerie van Economische Zaken, 2017. Overeenkomst tussen de Staatssecretaris van Economische Zaken en het College van Gedeputeerde Staten van de provincie Flevoland. Dierenwelzijn in de Oostvaardersplassen, 7pp.
- Ministerie van Infrastructuur en Milieu, 2017. Fact sheet Lelystad Airport. Toekomstige vliegroutes Lelystad Airport. 5pp.
- Olf, H., Vera, F.W.M., Bokdam, J., Bakker, E.S., Gleichman, J.M., De Maeyer, K., Smit, R., 1999. Shifting mosaics in grazed woodlands driven by the alternation of plant facilitation and competition. Plant Biology 1: 127-137.
- Perreira, H.M. & Navarro, L.M., 2015. Rewilding European Landscapes. Springer International Publishing, 227pp.
- Provincie Flevoland, 2018. Opdracht op grond van artikel 3.18, lid 1 Wet natuurbescherming (Wnb) voor het doden van edelherten met gebruikmaking van het geweer, voorzien van demper en met gebruikmaking van nachtzichtapparatuur, in het belang van de wilde flora en fauna en van de instandhouding van natuurlijke habitats (art. 3.17, lid b Wnb), ter beperking van de omvang de populatie van dieren in verband met de maximale draagkracht van het gebied waarin de dieren zich bevinden (art. 3.10, lid 2, c Wnb) en ter voorkoming of bestrijding van onnodig lijden van zieke of gebrekkige dieren (art. 3.17, lid c Wnb), 15pp.
- Te Raa, B., 2013. Stad en Natuur. Een bijzondere Almeerse geschiedenis. Stichting Stad en Natuur Almere, 40pp.
- Staatsbosbeheer, 1998. De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve (Lelystad, the Netherlands), application, 21 pp.
- Staatsbosbeheer, 2011. Managementplan Oostvaardersplassengebied 2011 -2015. Uitwerking en implementatie van ICMO2 maatregelen, monitoring en communicatie. Status: concept. 36 pp.
- Staatsbosbeheer, 2014. Resolution CM/ResDip(2008)1 on the revised regulations for the European Diploma of Protected Areas. Annual report for the year 2014, 5pp.
- Staatsbosbeheer, 2015. Beheerplan Oostvaardersveld 2015-2020, 31pp.
- Staatsbosbeheer, 2015. Oostvaardersplassengebied, 16pp.

- Staatsbosbeheer, 2015. Resolution CM/ResDip(2008)1 on the revised regulations for the European Diploma of Protected Areas. Annual report for the year 2015, 5pp.
- Staatsbosbeheer, 2016. Resolution CM/ResDip(2008)1 on the revised regulations for the European Diploma of Protected Areas. Annual report for the year 2016, 5pp.
- Staatsbosbeheer, 2017. Resolution CM/ResDip(2008)1 on the revised regulations for the European Diploma of Protected Areas. Annual report for the year 2017, 5pp.
- Staatsbosbeheer, 2018. Draft Annual report extract for the year 2018, 3pp.
- Staatsbosbeheer, 2018. Wet natuurbescherming: vergunning afschot edelherten Oostvaardersplassen in het kader van de reset grote grazers, 14pp.
- Staatsbosbeheer 2019. Maandupdate februari 2019 Oostvaardersplassengebied. 3pp.
- Van Geel, P. (Externe Begeleidingscommissie beheer Oostvaardersplassen), 2018. Advies beheer Oostvaardersplassen. Kaders voor Provinciaal Beleid, provincie Flevoland. 77pp.
- Vera, F.W.M., 1997. Metaforen voor de wildernis. Eik, hazelaar, rund, paard. Wijk bij Duurstede, 426pp.
- Vera, F.W.M., 2000. Grazing Ecology and Forest History. CABI-Publishing, Wallingford, 506pp.
- Vera, F.W.M., 2018. De sterfte in de Oostvaardersplassen in een internationaal kader. Vakblad Natuur, Bos Landschap 150: 20-22.
- Vulink, J.T. 2001. Hungry herds. Management of temperate lowland wetlands by grazing. PhD thesis University of Groningen.
- Vulink, J.T., Van Eerden, M.R. 1998. Hydrological conditions and herbivory as key operators for ecosystem development in Dutch artificial wetlands. In: M.F. WallisDeVries, J.P. Bakker, & S.E. Van Wieren (Eds). Grazing and Conservation Management (pp. 217-252). Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht.
- Wigbels, V., 2012. Leve de Oostvaardersplassen. 40pp.
- Witsen, P.-P., 2018. Nationaal Park Nieuw Land. Onderbouwing van de aanvraag, 52pp.
- 10.2 Consulted websites**
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_PocHU5VYY, 2014. Trailer De Nieuwe Wildernis
- <https://www.staatsbosbeheer.nl/over-staatsbosbeheer/dossiers/oostvaardersplassen-beheer/feiten-en-cijfers/jaartallen>: historical dates important for the OVP NR
- <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/luchtvaart/ontwikkeling-lelystad-airport>).
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yoDo5i18FMY&feature=youtu.be> local appreciation of the Lelystad Airport location and potential effects
- <https://tvblik.nl/argos-tv-medialogica/oostvaardersplassen-van-droom-tot-nachtmerrie> reactions on the newly installed management in OVP including shooting large herbivores
- <https://www.coe.int/en/web/bern-convention/european-diploma-for-protected-areas>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9VuLM4LLJOgb>. Zondag met Lubach discussing the Oostvaardersplassen management