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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
WOLLMATINGER RIED - UNTERSEE-GNADENSEE NATURE
RESERVE**

(GERMANY)

11-12 July 2018

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PREFACE

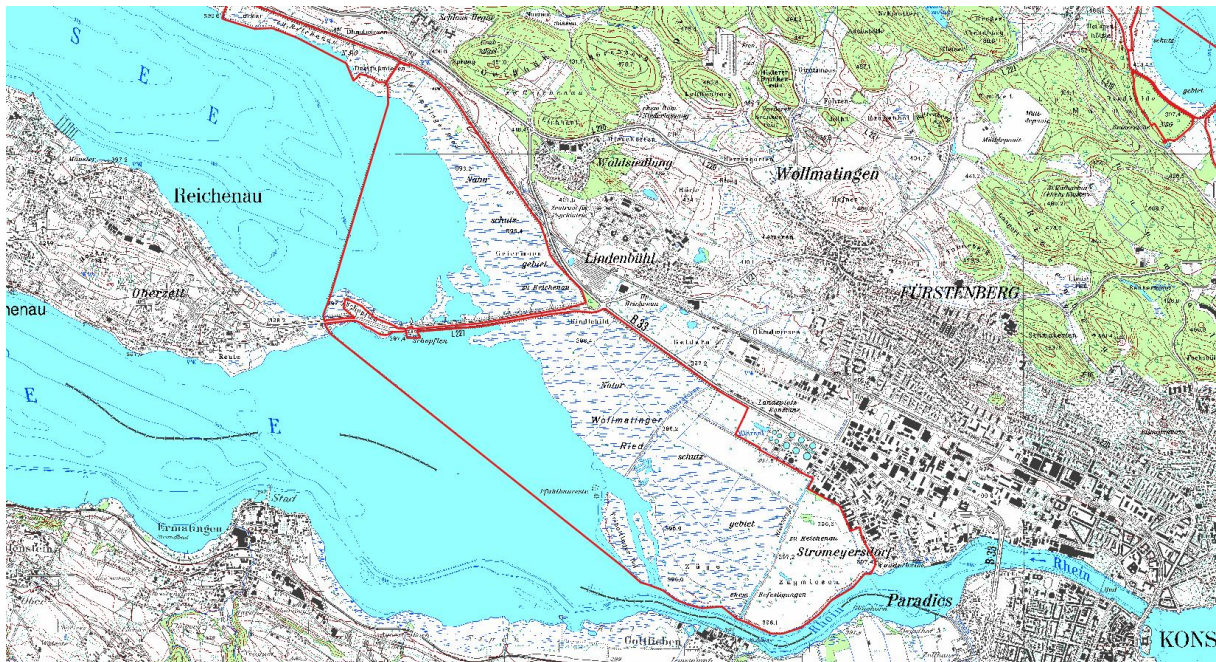
The on-the-spot appraisal was carried out in July 2018 for the first time since 2008. The Diploma for the Wollmatinger Ried – Untersee – Gnadensee Nature Reserve has been granted until 28 November 2019 (Resolution CM/ResDip (2009)2), adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 21 October 2012. The visit of the area took place on 11 and 12 July 2018. The site was awarded the European Diploma for the first time in November 1968.

AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS

Official documents concerning the European Diploma include the on-the-spot appraisal reports 2003¹ and 2009², the renewal Resolution of 2009³ and the annual reports for the years 2015, 2016 and 2017. A management plan is available, but not updated. The representatives of the area visited provided further information material like brochures and maps both in printed and electronic form.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The Wollmatinger Ried – Untersee – Gnadensee Nature Reserve is situated in the Federal State Baden-Württemberg near the town of Konstanz at the German – Swiss border. With the total area of 774 ha, the site is the largest protected area on the German side of the Bodensee (Lake Constance). The area has been partly protected since 1930. In 1938, 435 ha were declared protected by a legal nature protection decree. In 1980, the area was enlarged to 767 ha, extending it mainly into the shallow water zone. Since 2005, the site has been part of a larger NATURA 2000 site under EU law and since 1976 a RAMSAR site. It is managed by the nature conservation organisation NABU on behalf of the Regierungspräsidium (Regional Council) Freiburg.



The Wollmatinger Ried – Untersee – Gnadensee Nature Reserve west of Konstanz (NABU)

Nature

Climate and hydrology

The Bodensee, the third largest lake in central Europe, dominates the climate in the area. Spring and summer are cooler, autumn and winter in average warmer than in other parts of southern Germany.

The river Rhine flowing from Switzerland and Austria into the lake regulates the water regime. The water level varies seasonally, with the lowest in February and a high water period with the snow

¹ Report PE-S-DE (2003)7

² Report T/PVS/DE (2009)3

³ Resolution CM/ResDip (2009)2

melting in the Alps in June and July. The Wollmatinger Ried has minimal height differences. Therefore, areas close to the shore are regularly flooded in early summer, in extreme situations more than 90 % of the protected area. Recently, summer high water has not been reaching the average level, but a trend cannot be confirmed yet.

Habitats and species

The protected area encompasses a shallow water zone, stretching towards the middle of the Ermatinger Basin. Next to the water there is a reed belt stretching from Konstanz to Hegne. Bedding or stray meadows mowed once a year, fodder meadows and wood, as well as beach ridges are also characteristic elements. Only parts of the area are accessible to individuals, other parts can be visited in guided excursions.

A peculiarity of the area is the so-called Schnegglisande. The genesis of the Schnegglisand is based on the occurrence of calcareous alga, precipitating calcium carbonate (CaCO_3) from high lime water and depositing it on the ground of the lake. The composition of Schnegglisand is also influenced by fragments of Conchylia.



Schnegglisand (Photo: NABU)

It is not necessary to list all the birds found in the Wollmatinger Ried. More than 300 species have been identified. Up to 50.000 individuals are counted in autumn. The shallow water is the habitat for fish breed; certain species like the spike (*Esox Lucius*), bream (*Abramis brama*) or tench (*Tinca tinca*) are professionally caught within the protected site. Economically important are pike, carp and eel. The strong reproduction of the stickleback (*Gasterosteidae*) in the last years can cause threats to the fish stock.



Reed warbler (Acrocephalus arundinaceus) and Black neck divers (Podiceps nigricollis)
 Photos: Tom Dove

Furthermore, 330 species of butterflies, 50 species of dragonflies and 27 species of grasshoppers were identified. Some decades ago, another 100 plants could be found, but disappeared over the years.



Lake Constance forget-me-not (Myosotis rehsteineri) and Emperor dragonfly (Anax imperator)
 Photo: Oliver Konopik (left) and Manuel Fiebrich

INFRASTRUCTURE

The only infrastructure in the protected area is a few outlooks and bird observation points, partly accessible only during guided tours. Only two hiking routes lead through the Ried, the Reichenau dam and the Gottlieber Weg, both equipped with information tables. The new NABU centre, which will officially be opened in October 2018, is not only a park centre for the Wollmatinger Ried but also housing the regional headquarters of NABU.

MANAGEMENT PLAN

The latest management plan specifically for the Wollmatinger Ried was approved in 1991 and was the basis of the project on “preservation and development of areas of national representative importance” implemented between 1991 and 1997. In 2014, the NATURA 2000 management plan of a wider area, but including the Wollmatinger Ried, was finalised. As usual, NATURA 2000 management plans aim to ensure the conservation of species and habitat.

Therefore, additional management measures should be added to the management plan to meet the requirements of the European Diploma. The management plan should address and specify the issues and challenges facing the Diploma holding area, outline the long-term plans for the area, and contain concrete operational objectives increasing the European interest of the protected area.

BUDGET AND STAFF

The annual budget for the Wollmatinger Ried is about €170.000. Approximately 53% are funded by the Land Baden Württemberg, other sources of income are sponsoring, voluntary contributions, visitors' fees and NABU dues. From this budget, one full time and one part time employee, four voluntary and about 20 honorary collaborators can be employed.

THREATS TO THE AREA, HABITATS AND SPECIES

Although both authorities and site management are motivated to preserve the area in good condition, various threats could be identified, caused mainly by human influence. Situated between the lake as part of the river Rhine, the trunk road B33 and the expanding city of Konstanz, the nature reserve is under pressure from fishery, leisure activities, traffic and growing demands for construction land. The responsible authorities are therefore called upon to work on solutions to guarantee a long-term protection and development of the nature reserve.

Fishery

Fishery is a sensitive question as fishing in the Ermatinger Basin is regulated by a bilateral treaty between Switzerland and Germany. This agreement guarantees access to fishing areas for fishermen of both countries (but not in the Gnadensee, where only German fishermen are allowed). Any change in this treaty has to be negotiated with both parties involved.

The Ermatinger basin with its shallow water zones is one of the important wintering areas in southern Germany and meets perfectly the food requirements of ten thousands of birds. The Swiss bank of the river and the Ermatinger Basin are protected but less strict than the German side.

The so-called *Schläuche*, a kind of passage though the Ried, and the southern Hegne bay, is important for protection of waterfowl as well as of interest for the fishery. The latter prefers to eliminate barriers to allow an easier access to the fishing grounds, although these barriers, the Schnegglesand and silting areas, are formed naturally and episodically eroded by high waters. Any intervention could disturb the natural processes. The argument of the fishing enterprises is not so much the amount of fish caught there, but the variety of species. It should be mentioned that fishing is done on a legal basis.

Leisure activities

More spare time and new types of sport equipment increase the pressure of leisure activities on nature in general. Kitesurfing and stand-up paddlers cause threats to the waterfowl, mountain bikes and E-bikes enlarge the reach of cyclists.

The nearby airstrip is the source of another disturbance. The zeppelin, offering flights across sensitive areas, hot-air balloons and ultra-light aircrafts can also be seen over the Ried. Furthermore, private boat owners or rental boat drivers do not always consider the borders of the protected area, either due to ignorance or unawareness of the legal restrictions.



Stand-up paddling and a zeppelin over the Ried cause perturbation (Photos: NABU (left) and R. Brunner)

Traffic routes

The main highway from Konstanz via Radolfzell towards the Black Forest (B33) forms partly the border of the protected area. The on-going extension of the road might cause more traffic (and hopefully less traffic jams), but some measures can be an advantage for the protected area, e.g. a green bridge linking NATURA 2000 sites north of the road with the Ried. A noise protection wall along the road functions also as a barrier against sprays after rain or snowfall.

A new cycling route has been built along the railway line some 200 m off the protected area, replacing an unofficial cycling path directly along the Ried. This path can easily lead people uncontrolled into the area and could negatively impact the newly built green bridge, as the cycle route crosses directly the end of the bridge.

Expansion of the city of Konstanz

The growing population of Konstanz and the need for affordable apartments causes pressure on open land. One of these areas is an airstrip along the B33 in the neighbourhood of the Ried. The planning department of the City of Konstanz is requested to consider the nature reserve and to provide buffers between new built-up areas and the Ried.

COMMENTS ON THE 2009 RECOMMENDATIONS⁴

Recommendations 2009

1. it is extremely important to allow the nature reserve to develop naturally, particularly in the shallow water sections. To this end, there should be no obstacles to the natural erosion and sedimentation processes;

Recently, the erosion and sedimentation processes developed under natural conditions. As requested by professional fishermen, barriers should be eliminated (see above). The recommendations will continue slightly adapted.

2. all fishing activity must be halted in the *Schläuche* and the Hegnebucht “lagoons” for an experimental three-year period in order to further reduce the disturbances arising. An overall assessment of this measure should cover both the waterfowl and fish ecology;

As fishing activities in the Ermatinger Basin are regulated by a bilateral agreement between Switzerland and Germany, any changes would require an international consultation mechanism. Furthermore, a complete research study on the influence of fishing activities in the *Schläuche* on the waterfowl is not possible currently for financial and technical and reasons. It cannot be assured that the results would be accepted by all parties involved.

3. the Wollmatinger Ried is a refuge area for avifauna sensitive to disturbances, particularly during the moulting season. Increasing numbers of ferruginous ducks (*Aythya nyroca*), a threatened species, are coming to the area north of the Reichenau “dyke road” for the moulting season. Few studies of this have been conducted, so it should be documented and all potential disturbances eliminated (fishing, water sports, etc.);

Due to the extended waterfowl monitoring, the significance of the nature reserve as an over-summering and moulting location for waterfowl is regularly documented. Although fishermen could smoothly enter the shallow water zone thanks to the high water level in spring, the number of fish traps and disturbances linked to such traps varies from year to year. However, there were more disturbances - mostly in July and August - caused by the noise of a megaphone used for the training of rowers directly south of the nature reserve border in the Ermatingen Basin. In addition, there were again more flights of the Zeppelin NT above the Ermatingen Basin. A new disturbance occurred due to the growing use of stand-up paddlers. Some progress was achieved in cooperation with various organisations and tour operators.

4. throughout the protected area, but especially in the Ermatinger Becken area, an effort is needed to harmonise protection measures by developing co-operation between Germany and Switzerland, for example, as part of the international conference of Lake Constance;

⁴ Resolution CM/ResDip(2009)2

So far, the Swiss partner, mainly the Canton Thurgau, did not show too much interest in co-operation and joint development and programmes. No representative of the Swiss authorities, although officially invited, participated in the appraisal meeting due to other obligations.

5. the scheduled road works to improve traffic flow at the entrance of the reserve – B33 and western bypass (Tangente West) – are part of a comprehensive landscape concept and must not be detrimental to the protected area. The compensatory measures necessitated by the work must be implemented as a matter of priority;

The work on the B33 is either finished or in realisation. The implementation of the permitted compensation measures was made possible through this recommendation. No further intervention needed.

6. the continued operation of the reception centre in the premises of the former Reichenau railway station is not guaranteed for the medium and long term. This question should be settled as soon as possible.

The centre is to be opened in October 2018. No further intervention needed. The new centre can help disseminate sufficient information about the Ried and its importance for the protection of birds. This might help raise the awareness for and understanding of the protective measures.

CONCLUSIONS

The visit was accompanied by numerous representatives of various organisations, experts, managers and staff. All the people working in any form either in or for the nature reserve are motivated and dedicated to the aims of protected areas.

European interest

The Wollmatinger Ried – Untersee – Gnadensee Nature Reserve is a RAMSAR and a NATURA 2000 site and an important bird area. In particular, moor-grass straggle-meadows (*Molinietum ceruleae*) and the ranges between low and high water level provide habitats for numerous plants and insects, partly of European importance. Its role as feeding area, wintering place, moulting area and breeding ground is undisputed and recognised. Nevertheless, it has to be called upon all parties involved to consider the importance of the area especially for European birdlife, to observe the needs of the area and to stop all activities and developments, which could disturb the function of the protected area. This should also be considered by the authorities in the neighbouring Switzerland.

Public awareness

The logo of the European Diploma is used on various brochures and on signposts and information boards. More detailed information will be provided in the new Nature Reserve Centre, which is going to be opened in October 2018. The management of the area should replace the old European Diploma logo by the recent version of the logo whenever possible. The display of the logo on the homepage should be considered.

Renewal of the Diploma

It is recommended to renew the European Diploma for the Wollmatinger Ried – Untersee – Gnadensee Nature Reserve for the period 2019 to 2029, taking into consideration the following conditions and recommendations:

Conditions

1. Carefully examine the legal possibilities
 - a) to enlarge the strict core zones of the Wollmatinger Ried – Untersee – Gnadensee Nature Reserve and/or
 - b) to end fishery in the most sensitive areas, mainly *Schläuche* and southern Hegne Bay, under the provisions of the bilateral treaty between Germany and Switzerland with the aim to improve the quality of the area as breeding ground, wintering place and moulting area. Results of these examinations should be reported to the Council of Europe within five years after the renewal of the Diploma.

2. Reject any proposals or plans to eliminate naturally-built barriers like the so-called Schneggliand and silting areas and to enable undisturbed natural processes without human intervention in a larger area, except in case of public interest e.g. flood protection.
3. By 2022 draft and adopt a management plan meeting the provisions and objectives of the European Diploma for Protected Areas and addressing the following the recommendations.

Recommendations

1. In co-operation with the Swiss authorities, assess the possibilities to harmonise the regulations for the protection of nature at both shores and to extend the Wollmatinger Ried – Untersee – Gnadensee Nature Reserve to the state border in order to enlarge the water zone, which is especially important during low water periods in winter.
2. Continue the efforts to improve the connections between protected sites in the hinterland and the Wollmatinger Ried – Untersee – Gnadensee Nature Reserve in connection with the extension of the trunk road B33, including the enlargement and/or adaption of the nature reserve's boundaries. Compensation measures should be continued and the construction has to be carried out in a least effect method for the protected area.
3. Abandon the still existing cycle path between the B33 and the protected area boundaries, which is only used by a limited number of cyclists, and include the path into the Wollmatinger Ried – Untersee – Gnadensee Nature Reserve to enable an efficient control.
4. Reduce or stop disturbances impacting on the protected area caused by leisure activities and sports through awareness raising and dissemination of information to boat rental companies, and to hot-air balloon and Zeppelin tour operators.
5. Strictly consider the boundaries of the protected area, their potential for further development and the need of sufficient buffer zones to meet the objectives of the protected areas when examining the further extension of building areas in the communities concerned.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The visit was perfectly organised by the responsible authorities, the Ministry, the Regierungspräsidium and the Nature Conservancy Organisation NABU as managing organisation, and was accompanied by a number of experts and stakeholders. The open discussion was highly appreciated.