

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Strasbourg 2 April 1985

SN-ZP (85) 31



COE182892

EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FOR THE CONSERVATION
OF NATURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Committee of Experts for Protected Areas

VANOISE NATIONAL PARK
(France)

On-the-spot appraisal

by

Théo Hunziker
(Switzerland)

3.963
09.3

AS THIS DOCUMENT WILL NOT BE
DISTRIBUTED DURING THE MEETING

PLEASE BRING THIS COPY

INTRODUCTION

At its meeting in May 1984, the Committee of Experts for Protected Areas was informed by the Secretariat that, in accordance with the Regulations for the European Diploma (1) an on-the-spot appraisal with a view to the renewal of the Diploma, category A, for the Vanoise National Park (France) was scheduled for 1984.

This appraisal was carried out on 25 and 26 June 1984 by Mr P Baum and Mr Th Hunziker, accompanied by Mr Borch-Jacobsen, Director of Environment and Local Authorities at the Council of Europe. We were accompanied by representatives of the national park. We were also given the opportunity to talk with the Chairman of the Administrative Council, of municipal leaders from the peripheral zone of the park, including in particular Mr G André, Mayor of Bonneval-sur-Arc, and with representatives of the Club Alpin Français (CAF), and of the press and radio.

The consultant wishes to thank all these persons sincerely for their assistance.

The report describes the observations made during the visit, the discussions which took place on that occasion and the conclusions drawn from the literature referred to below.

Moreover, the consultant's appraisal is based on the general conditions contained in the Regulations for the European Diploma (Appendix I, para. 1.5.4), the recommendations of Resolution (81) 11 of the Council of Europe concerning the last renewal of the Diploma dated 26 May 1981 (4), and on the general and specific French legislation relating to national parks (2).

1. Findings

1.1 The importance of the Vanoise National Park for nature and landscape conservation at European level is already fully established (see literature). The consultant may therefore confine his observations to the aspects of supplementary importance for the question of renewal of the Diploma. In the case of more or less identical findings, reference is made to the relevant remarks in his report on the Western Pyrenees National Park.

For reference, we should first note some general background information concerning the first national park to be established in France (1963), information necessary for understanding the case and taking decisions:

- Area of the park (central zone): approximately 53,000 ha (530 km²)
- Height above sea level: 1,200-3,800 m; the park is situated in a region of high mountains
- "The main purpose of establishing a national park is to secure a portion of the national territory in order to safeguard its natural beauty and preserve its biological assets; this can only be achieved if the environment in question is a spatial entity viewed in a long-term context."

It is therefore appropriate in this connection to reaffirm the principle of the inviolability of the boundaries of a national park, while reserving the right to evaluate the marginal character of all activities outside the protected area and to take, or not to take, them into account according to the significance or insignificance of their effects on the balance of nature in the park." (5)

- The park (central zone) extends from south-west to north-east over 50 km, and varies in breadth from 5 to 20 km. Its boundaries were to some extent determined by reference to political rather than ecological criteria.
- The park is made up of pasture land, an impressive alpine landscape of mineral rocks and water (peaks and crags, glaciers, streams and lakes). The area under forest is not extensive and is concentrated in the peripheral zone and beyond.
- Land ownership in the park: 47,000 ha of municipally-owned land (90%) and 5,200 ha of private land (10%). Only a few hectares are state-owned.

1.2 Protection of fauna and flora

No new aspects have arisen which might make renewal of the Diploma open to question. However, it should be noted that objects of ecological value do undoubtedly exist in the peripheral zone, some of them of greater value than those in the central zone. There is nothing to prevent the subsequent creation in these places of integral reserves attached to the park, nor should this be at the price of encroachment on the area of the park itself or of its facilities, and conflicting with its purpose.

1.3 Traditional exploitation

As regards agriculture (grazing), hunting and fish-farming, the legal status and material conditions of the park are generally comparable to those of the Western Pyrenees National Park (see SN-ZP (85) 32, point 1.2), except for the question of bear hunting. The noticeable increase in the tendency to replace cattle by sheep is particularly questionable and should not be tolerated or passed over without comment in the case of a recipient of the category A Diploma.

1.4 Research and information, management, legal status

Without any way intending to facilitate his task, the consultant has no criticism to make on these three points. On the contrary, he wishes to congratulate those responsible, in particular the Director of the park, for their conscientious efforts (see in particular relevant information under 7).

1.5 Financing

At present, there are still no important objections regarding fulfilment of the park management's task in this respect. On the other hand, as regards the recent suggestion that the French national parks, including the Vanoise Park, should be self-financing, the consultant feels obliged seriously to question this proposal, on account of the deplorable consequences it might entail.

In this connexion, he refers to the various considerations contained in documents SN-ZP (85) 32 and 29. This problem is evidently of critical importance for the question of renewal of the Diploma.

1.6 Current problems of crucial importance for the Park

Here the consultant wishes to draw attention to the fact that, in his opinion, the incidents enumerated below threaten to undermine the cohesion of the Vanoise National Park, as also that of all other French national parks - irrespective of the question of renewal of the Diploma. Their common feature is that those responsible for them describe them as being "necessary" encroachments, affecting only a localised area, and whose effects can be compensated for. This is the case, in particular, for the projected dam, apparently to be tolerated by the park, to be constructed near La Raie, where, to our stupefaction, geological borings are already taking place on a massive scale (is the intention to create a fait accompli?); or for the intention to construct a drag lift for skiers across the Park between Val d'Isère and Bonneval. Likewise, demands to take water from the central zone to meet the needs of tourists in the peripheral zone are becoming more and more pressing (for example, water from the lac de Merlet to supply Courchevel).

Taking Bonneval as an example, the following considerations reveal the nature of the problem (9a):

"Situated at an altitude of 1800 m at the end of the Maurienne valley at the foot of 12 glaciers, this village remained mediaeval until the mid-20th century. Devastated in 1957 by catastrophic floods, it was almost abandoned by the 131 remaining inhabitants, but these managed to stay on, taking care to adapt to progress without losing touch with their roots and their identity. Various initiatives ensued:

Establishment of a modern cheese-making cooperative, construction of 50 chalets in traditional style each containing 3 apartments for tourists, without recourse to outside capital, renovation of old roofs, creation of a municipal winter sports centre with 10 drag lifts, two underground car parks for 140 cars, burial of all airborne cables, classification of some notable buildings and designation of 9/10ths of the municipal territory as a protected green zone.

From 1956 to 1982 around 100 million francs were invested. Today Bonneval has 211 inhabitants, 70% of whom are under the age of 30." (C. Pairaudeau)

Editors' comments:

"This successful example of new environmentally sound tourist activity is threatened by changes in external conditions. A change in legislation provides for a substantial reduction in the income derived by the municipality from exploitation of its hydraulic resources, and which it uses to service the debt and cover the deficit for the drag lifts. Instead of being paid to Bonneval, the plan is to pay it into an inter-municipal equalisation fund, with the result that from 1990 it would be reduced by 90% or by 10 million francs by year.

The company running the ski-lifts in Val d'Isère would be willing to assume responsibility for the deficit on the drag lifts at Bonneval on condition that a link was constructed between this resort and the Col de

l'Iseran, enabling a ski circuit to be opened. Bonneval might then be submerged under a stampede of trans-Alpine skiers, and become the victim of developments beyond its control. Who will come to the rescue of this pilot scheme, which has been singled out for several awards? The state, perhaps?"

A stop must also be put to any scheme to draw water from the central zone, prompted by the tourist boom in the peripheral zone, which is sparking off an unbounded frenzy of construction.

Regarding the problems of the relationship between the central zone and the peripheral zone, the consultant has gone into this matter in depth in his appraisal of the Western Pyrenees National Park; the considerations set out there apply also to the Vanoise National Park.

The following supplementary information should be added:

- i. No overriding national public interest exists to justify construction of a dam at La Raie and consequently, requiring toleration of this encroachment on the very heart of the park. Is not the government's decision of November 1984 to suspend the project in line with this view?
- ii. From the point of view of protection of the landscape, it is no doubt to be hoped that the exemplary efforts by Bonneval to ensure its survival and the safeguarding of its site will be successful. Nevertheless, the success of these efforts should not depend on the construction of a ski drag-lift link with Val d'Isère, which would be detrimental to the park. The state should make the necessary financial resources available to the locality without delay, in order to help it effectively to escape from its present predicament. Furthermore, what is the value of continuing to philosophise at length about how the locality's critical financial situation might have been avoided if ...

The zones worthy of preservation should be taken into account as compensating for the financial aid invested (creation of integral zones); this should not, however, involve any compensatory encroachment on the park.

2. Conclusions

Considering the facts set out here, the consultant proposes that the Council of Europe should renew the category A Diploma for the Vanoise National Park, subject to the conditions set out under point 3 below, failure to observe which should lead to procedure for the withdrawal of the European Diploma.

3. Conditions

3.1 The recommendations contained in Resolution (81) 11 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe of 26 May 1981 remain entirely valid. The park management must make every effort to implement them.

3.2 Where sufficient reason exists, as for example in the case of Bonneval-sur-Arc, the municipalities in the peripheral zone must be advised and given financial support by the state. The creation of integral reserves or any

other measure taken for the protection of sites should be considered as compensation not warranting the authorisation of encroachments on the park (see 1.6.1).

3.3 It is essential to abandon the project for a drag lift crossing the park linking the two localities of Val d'Isère and Bonneval-sur-Arc. The same applies to the project to construct a dam near La Raie and to any other future projects in the park (such as those connected with water supply, for example).

3.4 Exchanges of land involving encroachments on the area of the park to be compensated for in the peripheral zone, must also be forbidden.

3.5 The state must make adequate financial resources available to the park management, since the possibility of self-financing in nature conservation is, in the very nature of things, limited.

Literature

- (1) Regulations for the European Diploma. Resolution (73) 4 of 19 January 1973.
- (2) National parks. Journal officiel de la République Française (issue dated 15 January 1977).
 - 2.1 Act No. 60-708 of 22 July 1960 on creation of national parks (p. 4).
 - 2.2 Decree No. 61-1195 of 31 October 1961, Prime Minister's Regulations for application of Act No. 60-708 of 22 July 1960 on creation of national parks (pp 5-22).
 - 2.3 Decree No. 63-651 of 6 July 1963 setting up the Vanoise National Park (pp 23-35).
- (3) Council of Europe on-the-spot appraisal by Prof. A Noirfalise (Belgium), 14 January 1980 (SN-R-DP (80) 24).
- (4) Resolution (81) 11 of the Council of Europe concerning the renewal of the European Diploma awarded to the Vanoise National Park (France), 26 May 1981.
- (5) Council of Europe working paper concerning the seminar for managers of areas holding the European Diploma, from 19 to 21 May 1981 (SN-ZP (81) 23).
- (6) Council of Europe memoranda concerning the meetings of the Committee of Experts on Protected Areas from 18 to 19 May 1981 (SN-ZP (81) 24) and from 9 to 10 May 1983 (SN-ZP (83) 32).
- (7) Annual reports from 1983 and 1984 on the Vanoise National Park (SN-ZP (84) 14; SN-ZP (85) 14).
- (8) Various publications on nature and landscape conservation in the park.
- (9) CIPRA-INFO No. 4, 12. 1984, FL-Vaduz, summary of the annual assembly at Chur (theme: environmentally sound tourist activities).