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Quality standards and criteria for the evaluation of German national parks, 2008

(Source: EUROPARC Deutschland e.V. (ed.): Quality criteria and standards for German national parks. Developing a procedure to evaluate management effectiveness. 2008. Berlin, Germany. Available online: http://www.europarc-deutschland.de/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/2008_Quality_criteria_and_standards_for_German_national_parks.pdf (accessed 15.06.2020).

Criteria	Standards
	1. Field of action - Framework conditions
Legal foundations	The national park is secured under national and state law. Laws and ordinances do not obstruct the implementation of the standards for national parks.
Protection purpose	The protection purpose of national parks is primarily that natural processes should be undisturbed with their natural biodiversity in all ecosystems in the national park, for which Germany bears national and global responsibility. As far as the protection purpose allows, other goals such as education, PR work, contact with nature, research, and monitoring are also to be implemented.
Overriding planning principles	Protection purpose, planning and management of the national parks as well as surrounding protected areas are integrated in the regional planning and other overriding basic planning provisions. In the federal state and regional planning programmes, the entire national park areas are classed as a “priority area for nature conservation”. The national park plan is also coupled with similar commitments in the federal state planning. In addition, concerns of the national parks are taken into consideration in the overriding planning. In the case of planning and projects in the vicinity of a national park, its interests are taken into consideration.
Responsibilities	The national park administration has all the official authorisation needed for the realisation of the protection purpose. Where other bodies have additional responsibilities in the national park, these take into account the goals and the concerns of the national park in their decision-making in agreement with the national park administration.
Ownership rights	The area of a national park should if possible be completely owned by the public hand. Where this is not the case, then permanent provision shall be made in order to secure the realisation of the goals of the national park.
Boundaries and shape	The outer boundaries of the national park shall be in accordance with the natural features. It encloses all sub-sections/elements of the ecosystem complex which is to be protected in an area which as far as possible is large, compact, and contiguous. The areas already have a high degree of closeness to nature or are suited to reach this within an acceptable period. They are virtually free of human settlements and transport infrastructure. The boundaries of the national park coincide with parcel boundaries in the land register or are specified in official sea charts.

	2. Field of action - Protection of natural biological diversity and dynamics
Space for natural processes	<p>Over most of their area, national parks protect the natural dynamics of processes of nature with as little disturbance as possible. In general, this is ensured within a period of not longer than 30 years after an area has been designated a national park and for at least 75% of the national park area. The areas for the protection of natural dynamic processes should be contiguous or uninterrupted, with few outer boundaries.</p> <p>National parks with more than 30 % of their area not in public ownership or which in Germany completely enclose a habitat which is of global importance can define a longer transition period in the national park plan or can protect large areas of representative types of habitat in their natural processes over most of its area.</p>
Extent	<p>A national park is extensive, taking into account the ecosystem-related criteria. It represents one or more ecosystems and ensures the process of natural dynamics. A national park must have an area of at least 10,000 hectares.</p> <p>As an exception, a smaller area can be a national park which is internationally representational. The area shall be so enclosed that the protection purpose is achievable within its boundaries.</p>
Degree of closeness to nature	National parks have over the larger part of their area ecosystems which are very nearly natural. These ecosystems have the natural species composition and diversity which is typical for the location.
Habitats of international and national significance	The national park contains habitats of international and/or national significance. These are shown in the management plan, which also includes definitions of the measures necessary to secure them that are permissible in terms of the space needed for natural processes.
Diversity management	Generally, species management is an exceptional situation in national parks. The necessary measures for this are presented in the management plan.
Ecosystem networking	The national park is connected by ecologically effective corridors with the important areas for habitats and species protection in its surroundings.
	3. Field of action - Organisation
Organisational structure of the protected area administration	<p>The national park administration is directly responsible to the highest nature conservation authority. It is an independent, efficient special authority. In particular it has the following duties:</p> <p>Conservation of natural processes, management, supervision of area, maintenance of recreational infrastructure for experiencing nature, contribution to education for sustainable development, monitoring and research, communication, cooperation, cooperation in regional development in the surroundings of the national park and general administration.</p>
Staff levels	The staffing levels ensure capable, on-going work on all the matters listed under "Organisational structure of the national park administration".
Ranger system	<p>Full-time personnel shall be provided by the national park administration, generally on permanent contracts, for the supervision of visitors and the monitoring of the compliance with the protection regulations. For the supervision work, the administration integrates a network of volunteers, honorary personnel and full-time staff of associations.</p> <p>The number of people needed for visitor guidance and supervision of the compliance with the protection regulations depends on the nature and size of the national parks, the numbers of visitors, the tasks involved, and the potential risks and disturbances.</p>

	The national park administration coordinates a uniform presentation and ensures a uniform level of information. The supervisors are well trained and receive regular further training. They are qualified as a certified nature and landscape carer, or have equivalent training.
Personnel management	The personnel management is carried out professionally by the national park administration. The objective is to achieve high levels of motivation and satisfaction of the personnel and high levels of efficiency. Staff work independently, they are involved in decision-making processes, receive regular further training and share in the internal flow of information. The national park administration has a clear voice in the selection of its personnel.
Financing	The full financing of the national park is provided by the federal state in each case. The financing covers at least the protection of natural processes, management, supervision of area, maintenance of recreational infrastructure for experiencing nature, contribution to education for sustainable development, monitoring and research, communication, cooperation in the regional development in the national park surroundings as well as general administration. Support by third parties for the goals of the national parks is desirable.
Advisory boards and board of trustees	Advisory boards, boards of trustees and other advisory bodies promote the development of the national park and support the integration of the national parks in the region.
	4. Field of action – Management
Vision of the national parks	Every national park has its own vision. This provides a foundation, is valid over the long term, is visionary, and is compatible with the overriding vision for German national parks von EUROPARC Germany (2005). The specific vision for the national park is anchored in the management plan. The vision is directed both inwardly towards the personnel, and also outwardly.
Management plan	The management plan is essential for the work of the national park administration. The goals of the national park are clearly identifiable in this. The plan contains the key fields of action, strategies and the planning for measures in order to achieve the vision and the specific goals. The plan is binding for the authorities. The management planning also specifies time-horizons and indicators to reach the individual goals. An important component of this is the determination of measures to monitor success. The management plan should be formulated not more than five years after the designation of the national park and subsequently updated at least every ten years.
Zoning	Zoning – where necessary – serves to structure the national parks in areas in which process protection has already been realised and areas in which management measures are being carried out temporarily or in the long-term. The process protection zone should be as contiguous and extensive as possible.
Renaturation	Renaturation measures in the national parks are limited to restoration or initial measures solely in those areas in which anthropogenic changes prior to the establishment of the national park have been such that it is not reasonable to expect natural self-regulation even in the long term. Renaturation measures are determined for a limited period in the national park plan. They serve to optimise the ecosystem quality of the national parks.

Use strategies	National parks are not aimed at the commercial utilisation of resources. Where such usage occurs in the national park it should not contradict the protection purpose and should only take place on a smaller part of the area of the national park. Utilisation which does not satisfy this condition is to be terminated as soon as possible.
Visitor guidance and area control	Visitor guidance takes place on the basis of a zoning strategy which forms part of the management plan. On the basis of the knowledge of nature conservation experts and experience with nature recreation, routes and areas are selected for the visitors and appropriately designated. In the national park, paths are signposted and where necessary no access areas are determined. The ranger service guides, informs and supervises.
Integration of the national parks in the region	The national park region is defined. The management plan contains recommendations for the national park region. The national park administration contributes to the planning for surrounding areas.
Evaluation of the measures	The necessity for the measures carried out in the fields of visitor guidance and supervision, educational work, nature conservation, species protection, and renaturation as well as volunteer management is examined at regular intervals and their success evaluated. The results are disseminated. The findings from the evaluation flow into the management process and where appropriate lead to alterations of the strategies and their implementation.
5. Field of action: Cooperation agreements and partners	
Cooperation agreements	The national park administration uses cooperation agreements and partnerships in order to gain the support of as many relevant social groups as possible for the shaping of the national park and its surroundings. The participants in the cooperation agreements and the partners acknowledge the goals of the national park and support them. The basis for the cooperation is the presentation of a strategy document by the national park administration concerning the general handling of the cooperation.
Integration in working groups and networks	The national park is integrated in many ways with its surroundings. It contributes significantly to the image of the region. The national park administration is actively represented in all relevant working groups and networks.
Volunteer management	National parks understand that the cooperation with volunteers is an enrichment of their activities and helps to establish the protected area in the region. It offers opportunities for people of all ages, with various qualifications, abilities and interests. The volunteer management programme includes professional supervision, the integration of volunteers in the team with full-time personnel as well as recognition of volunteers.
6. Field of action - Communication	
Message	The messages of all communication activities promote the unique selling point of the national parks and strengthen its product and image position. The messages are targeted towards selected groups, have a depth of content and also reach the emotions.
Corporate design (CD)	The corporate design (CD) and the corporate identity (CI) provide a uniform image, based on the specifications in a CD Manual, with which the protected area administrations can present their national park in all their communications as belonging to the "National Nature Landscapes".

Communications structure	The national park administrations communicate with the relevant target groups at regional and national levels. In addition to regularly collecting up-to-date information, the direct dialogue with the target groups is also very important. This offers the opportunity to inform about the role of the national parks, their specific tasks and special activities and at the same time to invite them to participate in joint activities. A communications structure is institutionalised to provide continuous contacts to partners, superior authorities and regional bodies such as advisory boards and board of trustees, special purpose associations, nature conservation societies and tourism associations.
	7. Field of action - Education
Educational strategies	Existing educational strategies for specific target groups are implemented as part of the work relating to national parks. It is essential that the educational plans are regularly up-dated and that the personnel are provided with further training. Educational courses are coordinated by the national park administration, and periodically evaluated.
Education courses	The educational contributions provide information about the goals and duties of the national parks and what can be found in them, with the main focus being placed on the central message of the national parks. The national park makes a contribution towards education for sustainable development. In the educational work, the idea of the national parks is linked to the global task – the conservation of natural basis of life for this and future generations.
Visitor guidance	For visitor guidance, the operating strategies adopted for the work of rangers, for education, and for other visitor supervision are coordinated with one another. The individuals involved know the approaches of the others who are contributing. The general guidance of visitors takes place in the information centre and at the individual information points. The personnel working there explain the general and specific duties and goals of the national parks and transmit identification with the national park.
	8. Field of action - Experiencing nature and recreation
Offers for experiencing nature	Encouraging people to experience nature is one of the most important tasks of a national park. The methods adopted will depend on the characteristics of the park itself. It will include offers for groups, individuals and for seasonal activities. In addition, the national park administration works together with cultural institutions in the region. Where it is appropriate and compatible with the protection purpose it combines cultural and natural experiences.
Infrastructure for visitors	An infrastructure for visitors exists in the national park. This is appropriate for the natural area and the protection purpose and is also attractive and visitor-oriented, while at the same time being in accordance with the principles of sustainable development. The signposting in the park is uniform and easily recognisable.
	9. Field of action - Monitoring and research
Research coordination	Research is directed towards questions which are relevant for national parks. The research strategy of the national park forms a part of the management plan. The national park administration assesses whether research projects proposed by third parties are compatible with the protection purpose, and also coordinates research projects.
Establishing fundamentals	The national park administration collects information about the features of the park over the whole of its area in the context of the landscape history and the history of its use, and this can provide the basis for the national park plan. The determination of the fundamentals can be carried over into a monitoring process.

Monitoring	Monitoring is carried out in the national park to an adequate extent and in accordance with uniform standards, and is oriented to the goals and the protection purpose of the national park. Among other things it also serves to check progress.
Documentation	The information collected in the general surveys, monitoring and project research is evaluated in accordance with scientific criteria, worked up, documented and shall be made accessible in a suitable form.
	10. Field of action - Regional development
Image	The national park is the most important image factor in its region. Survey are conducted regularly to determine the status of its image among the residents and visitors, as a way of monitoring the success of the park's own communications strategy.
Impulses for the region	The positive effects of the national parks for the region are regularly measured, documented, communicated outwards, and developed further.
Impulses for sustainable regional development	The national park administration provides impulses for sustainable regional development. In particular it contributes to the formulation of a sustainable mobility strategy for the region. The strategy provides the basis for traffic guidance measures and traffic calming as well as for the deployment of environmentally-friendly means of transport in the region in general and in the park itself, in order to make the park accessible and enjoyable. In addition, the national park administration cooperates locally in the development of sustainable tourism.