

Transboundary Parks...Following Nature's Design

Launch

Eva Pongratz

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On 10th May 2003, the certificate developed by the EUROPARC Federation for exemplary transboundary cooperation between protected areas, entitled "Transboundary Parks – Following nature's design", was awarded for the first time to the neighbouring national parks of Neusiedler See and Fertő-Hanság on the Austrian-Hungarian border.

This achievement, as you have heard from the previous presentation, follows a good deal of hard work and effort, dedicated to the aim of raising the quality of cooperation between protected areas at borders. Indeed, it represents the culmination of 15 years' work by the EUROPARC Federation on this topic, and is the result of 3 years' specific study to develop Basic Standards for transboundary cooperation and an associated certification system.

On the occasion of the 5th World Parks Congress in Durban, EUROPARC is pleased and proud to formally launch this new initiative with certificate for transboundary protected areas in Europe.

Today's launch pays tribute to the varied working groups and individuals from different parts of the world who have contributed their time and energies to EUROPARC's work in this field – the pictures show just two of the expert forums or working groups involved in recent years.

We also gratefully acknowledge the assistance provided by those protected area authorities in varied corners of Europe who have helped to test the certification system during the course of its development, and who have shared their own, very practical experience of day-to-day transboundary cooperation for the benefit of other parks within the EUROPARC network and beyond.

As you have already heard, these protected areas include Alpi Marittime and Mercantour in Italy and France, Neusiedler See and Fertő-Hanság in Austria and Hungary and Krkonose-Karkonosze on the Czech-Polish border.

Now it is time to open up the system for other protected areas, and enable them to benefit from the EUROPARC model for transboundary cooperation.

The EUROPARC Federation therefore invites European protected areas at borders to use the system of Basic Standards to help improve mutual cooperation, and encourages those which are working closely together to come forward for certification. Besides the benefits which application of the Basic Standards can bring to the level and quality of cooperation, the receipt of such an "award for excellence" brings national and international recognition to the work of the recipient parks, and gives new motivation for future work. Furthermore, it can

help raise the profile of the wider transboundary park region and project a positive image of the parks to both locals and visitors.

However, we should also look beyond Europe's borders. This certification system is - at present – globally unique. We are persuaded that the fields of work and precise quality criteria defined by the EUROPARC Federation offer an excellent framework for assessing cooperation between protected areas at political borders, whatever the type of protected area, and whatever the type of landscape or ecosystem – and not just in Europe, but in varied regions of the world.

On this special occasion, EUROPARC would therefore like to present the results of its work to IUCN, in the form of the bound report you see illustrated here. In this way, we make a very tangible contribution to global activities being carried out in this field, and we look forward to assisting further with our experience in future.

For indeed, in pursuing this topic, we are all working towards the same overriding goals – to help overcome boundaries, to contribute to the conservation of nature, to regional development, and to peace and understanding between peoples.

With this, we come full circle back to the theme of this 5th World Parks Congress: "Benefits beyond boundaries".

It is up to us to find these benefits, Ladies and Gentlemen, and for this we have come together here in Durban.

Ad multos annos of effective cooperation!

Eva Pongratz

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