

Natura 2000 and leisure

Report on the international expert meeting in
Houthem-Sint Gerlach (the Netherlands)
May 26 - 28, 2004



Stichting

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INTERNATIONAL EXPERT MEETING NATURA 2000 AND LEISURE

Communiqué

On May 26 – 28 experts working for the European Commission, and several national governments met at Chateau Sint Gerlach in the Netherlands. The aim of this informal meeting was to share and exchange ideas about the relationship between Natura 2000 and leisure. The purpose of exchanging these ideas was to highlight the opportunities that Natura 2000 has to offer for sustainable development of tourism, recreation and sport.

The expert meeting was initiated by the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality and organised by the Stichting Recreatie, the expert centre on leisure and recreation. Besides the participants of the European Commission, representatives of the national governments of France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and of the governments of the Flemish and Walloon regions of Belgium attended, all experts in the fields of nature and tourism policies.

On the first day of the meeting the representatives of the EC informed the participants of European policies and actions on sustainable tourism and Natura 2000. By means of case studies, participants of the various countries presented overviews of the problems these countries encounter while implementing Natura 2000. It became clear that countries are opting for a wide range of possible solutions in e.g. the fields of communication, management plans and addressing local governments and stakeholders. On the basis of the presentations two themes were chosen for further elaboration in two workshops: communications and public relations, and planning.

On the first day the participants also made an excursion organised by the province of Limburg. Dutch habitat areas in the Geuldal and the Pietersberg and Jekerdal and a few adjoining campsites were visited. The participants also visited a city park in the city of Maastricht, which had been opened that same day. This park was created in order to restore the natural banks of the river Jeker within the city and to link green areas within the city to the habitat area of the Pietersberg and the Jekerdal.

On the second day the workshops took place. The main conclusions from these workshops are stated below.

General conclusions

- Nature management and leisure management are ‘friends’ rather than ‘enemies’. Both sectors strive for beautiful natural areas and landscapes.
- This alliance provides a lot of opportunities on a practical level. Nature can benefit from leisure management actions, and vice versa.
- However, due to a lack of sufficient communication, nature and leisure sometimes ‘think’ they are enemies, especially when new tourism development plans are at stake.
- There is room for improvement, especially with respect to adequate information on Natura 2000 sites for the tourism sector and better co-operation between nature and leisure.
- For this, active participation is needed by decision makers in the fields of both nature and leisure, and a fresh start with respect for each others’ interests.

Communication and awareness

- Four target groups need to be taken into account: citizens, regional and local authorities, stakeholders and visitors. Each of these groups has its own role with respect to Natura 2000 and needs to be approached accordingly.
- Three stages of implementation could be identified: designation, development of management plans, and regular operation. At each stage communication needs must be identified.
- During the process, providing information and discussion is essential, and assistance of facilitators is necessary.
- Local authorities are essential to facilitate the process. Representatives recruited from their own group can be of great help.
- At the beginning of the process an analysis of the field of influence on national and local level is essential for both planning and communication.
- Recommendation: Assess and evaluate good (and bad) practices and provide this information to policymakers at the EU and member state level. A start could be a study aimed at finding good (and bad) practices on a local level and to make the information available through e.g. web sites and publications.

Planning

- Management plans could serve as bridges to bring nature conservation and leisure management together.
- Three approaches could be followed with respect to management plans: 1) existing nature management plans could be made 'Natura 2000-proof', 2) more integral sustainable management plans could be drafted, and 3) for simple situations, simple conservation plans will probably be sufficient. Recommendation in this respect: (1) challenge policymakers and authors of management plans to incorporate issues of leisure development into those plans; (2) the general feeling was that there is no 'golden rule how to do this' or 'one solution which fits all', and that tailor made solutions are needed.
- There are different experiences and approaches for organising the development of management plans. Sometimes these are reactive processes, responding to development proposals. In other cases the process is proactive, engaging stakeholders-involvement right from the start. Recommendation with respect to the development process of management plans: (1) there is a need for a tourism strategy plan as an input into management plans; (2) exchange of information is crucial; (3) local stakeholders should participate actively in the process and all partners need to have a clear vision.
- All agreed that there are ample designations, but also that this is an administrative problem, and not one for citizens. Recommendations in this respect are (1) integrate all nature conservation designations into one management plan; (2) if possible, integrate other aspects. e.g. zoning, into the management of different recreational activities; (3) encourage co-operation and communication between public servants.

1 PRESENTATIONS ON EUROPEAN POLICIES

1.1 Communication (2003) 716; Basic orientations for the sustainability of European tourism

By Piet Jonckers, European Commission, DG Enterprise, Tourism Unit



The process of promoting sustainable development by defining and implementing a European Agenda 21 for Tourism started in early 2002.

The key issues on the agenda are: problems related to transport, use of natural and cultural resources, high seasonability, and the impact of tourism on local society. By implementing specific strategies, tourism activity can be realigned to meet both sustainable requirements, and new challenges and demands from changing tourism trends and activities.

So far, the European Commission has promoted the introduction of ecolabels for hotels (those for campingsites are being prepared) and financed the VISIT project (Voluntary Initiatives for Sustainability In Tourism). Despite several European and NGO initiatives, progress is slow: there is no significant change. The tourism sector is not yet adapting to sustainability. It is no priority of the managers (95% of tourism businesses are small or medium sized). Policies devised at high level do not reach the players on the ground. Action is needed to associate, involve and address those players on the ground more directly and to formulate easily accessible messages that are easy to understand.

What the European Commission intends to do is:

- Increase interaction with destinations and their representatives
- Increase interaction between stakeholders and destinations and promote partnerships between various stakeholders
- Mobilise existing competence and support centres for the development of knowledge and observation regarding tourism
- Networking of competencies and support centres
 - These measures are now to be implemented by means of stakeholder commitment, a Sustainable Tourism Group, commission working arrangements, co-operation agreements, and stakeholder support. The progress report on this implementation is expected next year. The agenda 21 for European Tourism is foreseen to be ready in 2007.

For more information:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/services/tourism/index_en.htm

Look at www.stichtingrecreatie.nl/iep for the PowerPoint presentation of Piet Jonckers

1.2 Sustainable tourism and Natura 2000

By Francois Kremer, European Commission, DG Environment, Nature and Biodiversity unit



In December 1999 the European Commission organised a seminar on sustainable tourism and Natura 2000 in Lisbon. Based on the results of this seminar, the Commission published the brochure “Sustainable tourism and Natura 2000, guidelines, initiatives and good practices in Europe” in October 2000.

Natura 2000 will become part of a global network of protected areas. The objective of the EU and its 25 member states is to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010. Tourism can play several positive roles in Natura 2000 areas. For instance, it can help raise awareness amongst tourists and locals of the need for conservation. It can also contribute to the local economy by providing an additional attraction or source of revenue. This encourages a greater acceptance of the protected area within the local community and can also raise additional funds for the conservation of the site itself.

Implementation

While progress in creating the network was slower than planned, today more than 18% of the EU’s territory has been designated as Natura 2000 sites (more than 15,000 sites covering 460,000 ha). So far 289 nature restoration or development projects with important parts concerning tourism and recreation on Natura 2000 sites have been co- financed by the LIFE-Nature instrument. For the EU-15 most of the lists of Sites of Community Importance will be established by the Commission by the end of 2004. The network will also be extended to the new member states. Implementing community nature legislation is primarily a responsibility of the member states. The European Commission has a monitoring and coordinating role. Failure of implementation by the member states makes them liable for condemnation by the European court. There may also be a link between the approval of certain structural Fund programmes and the designation of Natura 2000 sites by the Member States. If a Court judgement is not implemented by a Member State, then this Member State may be fined. There is also an obligation to compensate for areas lost or damaged.

Management

There are significant challenges in ensuring that the Natura 2000 sites are adequately protected and managed. The commission has received a large number of complaints relating to bad management of Natura 2000 sites. She has therefore provided guidance on the safeguard provisions dealing with the management of sites (article 6 of the ‘Habitat Directive’).

Celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Habitats directives in May 2002, Europe’s Environment ministers signed the “El Teide Declaration” committing themselves to important objectives and principles that should be followed in managing the Natura 2000 network:

- Promoting awareness and understanding of Natura 2000 and supporting experience-sharing and good practice.
- Promoting the development of partnerships involving a broad range of stakeholders.
- Supporting the sustainable use and management of Natura 2000 areas for educational and recreation purposes.
- Ensuring the needs of Natura 2000 are considered in other EU policies.

- Recognising that these objectives require targeted resources.

To ensure that Natura 2000 will be a success, it will be necessary to improve communication with all audiences, from policymakers to citizens. The real value and objectives of Natura 2000, what it really implies to designate a Natura 2000 site and why at the end everybody benefits from Natura 2000 sites, all this should be better explained to the citizens. Natura 2000 sites are not a burden 'imposed by Brussels' but rather a real element of wealth and an opportunity for sustainable rural development for all citizens and local communities concerned. Natura 2000 sites should be considered as the 'jewels in the crown' rather than undesirable areas of unproductive land.

For more information: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/nature/home.htm>.





2 PRESENTATIONS OF THE PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES

2.1 Towards a charter of co-operation between the Tourist Office for Flanders and Nature Department

By Mia Lammens, Toerisme Vlaanderen and
Martine Lejeune, Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap



The Tourist Office and the Nature Department have recently started working on a joined charter of co-operation.

Aspects to elaborate in the charter are:

- Respect for biodiversity, natural and cultural features and the quality of the environment ;
Respect for social and cultural identity
- Achieving the right balance between recreation and tourist development, the needs of local communities and conservation
- Using recreation and tourism-related earnings for the conservation of natural areas and the local population
- Developing recreation and tourism based on what each area is able to cope with
- Sharing responsibility

Sixty percent of the Flemish Ecological Network (VEN) overlaps with Natura 2000 areas. In this VEN recreation is not a hot topic. Recreation is mainly route dependent. The main problems of recreation in natural areas are: restricted accessibility, conflicts between recreational users, badly equipped routes, and pressure on the attractiveness of an area. These problems can be solved by zoning, separating routes for different types of recreation, rearranging existing routes with basic facilities (e.g. signposting, shelter), and abolishing less attractive and badly equipped routes.

An example is the accessibility plan for Oudsberg, a natural area consisting of land dunes, heathland, and woods. To reduce the impact of recreation on this area, a management plan and accessibility measures were needed. All stakeholders, including the camping site, were interviewed about their demands and wishes and participated in the planning process. The central dune, the most vulnerable area, is now accessible only for walkers and forbidden for horse riders and bikers. They accepted this, because it was 'good for nature'.

Discussion topics to be dealt with in the charter are: How to measure capacity? What is considered small scale? How to deal with cumulative effects? Different types of protected areas will need specific approaches in relation to recreation and tourism.

For more information: <http://www.toerismevlaanderen.be>

Look at www.stichtingrecreatie.nl/iep for the power point presentation of Mia Lammens and Martine Lejeune

2.2 French Experiences with Natura 2000 and leisure

By Sylvie Barrere, Agence Francaise pour l'ingénierie Touristique and Claudine Zysberg, ministère de l'Ecologie et du développement Durable



Nature conservation has had an important preoccupation within French environment policy since the 1960s. For forty years legislative and statutory texts have been developed: national park law, natural park regulations, coastline conservation, Nature Protection law (including environmental impact assessment), mountain law, coastline law and water law.

This makes the adaptation of the Habitats and Bird Directives in France very complex.



There are now 153 Bird sites and 1216 Habitat sites of which 77 marine. There are regulations for the impact of environmental assessment / incidence assessment and the government proposes two tools for the management of the Natura 2000 sites: a pilot committee and an objectives document.

Every site has a pilot committee made up of representatives of administration, local authorities, nature associations, farmers, forest owners, and sometimes people working in the tourism industry and sports associations. The objectives document is made

by the environment regional direction, with a precise description of the Natura 2000 site, the protected species and the authorised and forbidden activities. This document is discussed with all those involved in the area. The status of the pilot committee is to advise on the management of the site. The regional 'prefect' decides on who may join the pilot committees. Those that are left out of the pilot committee 'have a serious problem'.

Good practices

In 1989 the ministry of environment and the ministry of tourism signed a convention to reduce the negative impact of tourism on the environment, promote nature tourism and involve leisure and tourism activities in nature protection.

Examples are ecolabels for coastline districts and marinas (blue flag) and camping and caravan sites (green key). So far 77 marinas and 100 campsites have been awarded flags. Four of those campsites are situated within a Natura 2000 site.

The National Park of Cévennes has signed the Europarc Charter of sustainable tourism in protected areas. It has supported an association of tourism service providers, Cévennes écotourisme, for defining a strategy and action plan. Six of these providers are going to sign the charter.

The ministry of Ecology, the Federation of Regional nature parks, the French tourist agency and the bird protection association LPO inquired into 'bird tourism' and analysed ten bird areas. One of these areas is "les Sept Iles" that attracts 100,000 visitors per year. The visits are organised by four boat companies that operate in partnership with the LPO. The boats can land on only one island. Another example is Natural Park "La Brenne", a protected wetland that received 30,000 visitors in 2000. Other examples of engaging leisure and tourism organisations to participate in nature protection are the agreement (Convention) between Port-Cros National Park and some divers' clubs, and the contract between the Geological reserve of Haute Provence and a Tourism service provider with a registered mark.

2.3 Natura 2000 and leisure, Experiences from Germany

by Barbara Engels, Bundesamt für Naturschutz



The implementation of Natura 2000 in Germany is not easy. Competences are shared between the Federal State and the German Länder. The Federal State is responsible for the national evolution of the sites proposed by the Länder and establishes the proposed Sites of Community Interest. The sixteen Länder all have a different approach to Natura 2000 regarding designation, management, implication assessment and monitoring. The present situation is that there is a large number of small sites, but the overall territory is small.

To analyse the conflicts between Natura 2000 and tourism activities, a research project was started in June 2003. Through questionnaires, interviews and meetings in tourism destinations with important Natura 2000 sites, data on conflicts were gathered and potential strategies for resolution and possible synergies were collected. Of the questionnaires 36.4% was returned, which is a good result. The outcome of the research project in May 2004 was:

- Hardly any acceptance of Natura 2000 (75% has a negative attitude)
- Severe lack of information, especially for the tourist sector
- Prejudices can be overcome
- Willingness to co-operate
- Planning and participation processes should create the conditions for co-operation between stakeholders

In order to improve the acceptance of Natura 2000 sites, conflicts and acceptance were analysed in 10 case studies. The outcome was that stakeholders fear loss of scope of action and financial disadvantages. The best moment to improve acceptance is at the planning, implementation and monitoring phase of conservation measures. There are two strategies: the establishment of an 'implementation consultant' and a compulsory screening phase before any measures are planned. Well-differentiated communication concepts are essential.

Good practices:

LIFE project Grindenschwarzwald is headed by the District Office for Nature Protection. 10 local partners have now agreed to undertake a joint initiative for an integrated approach to preserve the region's conservation value. The project concentrates on both habitat conservation and visitor management. Intensive public relations work and direct visitor management will be part of these measures. To adapt the information on Natura 2000 to different sectors, the Bundesamt für Naturschutz co-operates with the main sector organisations. Thus the information is more readily accepted. Examples are the brochures on 'Natura 2000 und sport' (in association with the German Sports Association), a guidance for Voluntary agreements between nature conservation and sport and the web site <http://www.natursportinfo.de>.

The ministry of Environment in Mecklenburg Vorpommern launched the information campaign "Sailing and Natura 2000". This area also signposted a Natura 2000 trail to attract more tourists.

Look at www.stichtingrecreatie.nl/iep for the power point presentation of Barbara Engels

2.4 Opportunities for nature and recreation in the Netherlands

By Martin Lok and Laura de Pundert, Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality



The Netherlands are a densely populated country (16 million inhabitants) with man-made, unique and valuable landscapes. The National Ecological Network will cover over 700.000 hectares in 2018. For Natura 2000 1 million hectares are designated as SPA/SCI, mainly water areas. In the Netherlands, nature and recreation are combined wherever possible, based on partnership and support: the so-called Dutch polder model. The target is public recreational access to 95% of nature areas. The Bird and Habitat Directives have encountered a lot of opposition.



To protect nature and at the same time accommodate new activities and functions, an integrated approach at regional level with multiple objectives (nature and others) is the best solution. The conditions must be agreed upon beforehand. Trade-off between positive and negative effects of recreational activities can be allowed under strict conditions. Conditions for this trade-off are:

- Maintain the sustainable conservation status and ecological coherence of the network;
- No threat to priority habitats or species
- Trade-off only for the same habitat type of species
- Net result is zero or positive
- Positive impacts precede negative ones
- Integral plan as a basis

An example of an integral approach is the provincial project 'Restructuring of holiday accommodation in the Veluwe' (90,000 ha, 600 holiday accommodations on 2800 ha, 28,000 nights spent). The aim is greater quality of recreational facilities and nature through shrinkage and growth. 100 ha of tourism areas will be removed and relocated. This shrinkage will be compensated for by 100 ha growth through expansion of existing business premises in clusters. In the shrinkage process account will be taken of restoration and development objectives in the Bird and Habitat Directives. Growth is not allowed in areas with outstanding natural values. Given current insides and working methods no significant damage is expected. In the stage of official plan design the provincial authority will judge if significant damage is to be expected. If the result is no significant damage, growth is allowed before shrinkage (by a maximum of 20 hectares). This differs somewhat from the above mentioned conditions.

Possible benefits are: both recreation and nature benefit from this integral approach. The relationship between nature, tourism and environmental organisations has improved; and daring to differentiate in natural values means more space.

Possible negatives are: the high costs of removal and relocation. The chosen approach of Bird and Habitat Directives is only possible in sparsely bounded or related areas with a dispersal of nature values. This approach only works if one looks from one function to another with respect.

Opportunities for mutual benefit offer commitment to invest in Natura 2000. The integral approach might be a solution, but is still in the pilot phase.

For more information: <http://www.minInv.nl/natura2000/>

Look at www.stichtingrecreatie.nl/iep for the powerpoint presentation of Martin Lok and Laura de Pundert

2.5 Natura 2000 and leisure, Walloon Region, Belgium

By Eric Jurdant, director for touristical Accommodations, Commissariat général au Tourisme Wallon



Wallonia has selected 239 Natura 2000 sites, comprising 220,000 ha (13% of the region). This is the highest percentage of all member states. The site selection and identification is complete, work on the scientific sites is still in progress.

The general idea of the sites has been accepted. There are tax advantages for owners and some economic activities, in e.g. mining areas, will be left out of the Natura 2000 sites. The main idea of Natura 2000 and leisure in Wallonia is to develop visitors' responsibility by showing them the exceptional value of the site. For each site a cost/benefit survey is needed (negative environmental impact, positive human impact).

Today the main projects are visitors' logistics and organising the hierarchy of each site according to its fragility and its attraction.

Examples are the Black storks, newcomers that attract much attention, but need much space (2 ha) for protection. And wooded peat bogs that are very vulnerable, but can be made accessible via special footpaths.

Good practices are a woodpath for disabled people in the Fagne de la Polleur and a sightseeing area with a very high wooden tower in the Fagne de Malchamps.

New accomplishments in sustainable tourism are

- Footpath signposting: in the woods, and also to the woods.
- Ecolabels: 15 gites panda, respecting the materials and the environment of the gites, the owner is a nature guide.
- Strict kayak flow regulation: kayaking was big business, but now people are coming up with other forms of adventure and nature tourism. Quads are also becoming a big problem.
- One umbrella organization for adventure/nature tourism: there are too many adventure organisations in Wallonia. This umbrella will produce rules and start an investigation into Dutch adventure tourism organisations operating in the Walloon region.
- Environment authorisation for campings has been needed since July 2003. Authorisation is very strict. The rules can be different for each camping. Problem is that 50,000 people live permanently on camping sites in flood areas.

Natura 2000 is one more chance to develop sustainable tourism. Wallonia is ready for co-operation between nature and leisure.

For more information: <http://natura2000.wallonie.be/home.html>

Look at www.stichtingrecreatie.nl/iep for the power point presentation of Eric Jurdant

2.6 Natura 2000 and leisure in the United Kingdom

By Graham Seymour, department of the environment (Northern Ireland) and Neil Black, Visit Scotland



The relationship between recreation/tourism and nature conservation in Natura 2000 sites in the UK is in many cases positive and beneficial. In Northern Ireland, for example, there is a marked correlation between Natura 2000 sites and the province's major tourist areas: Strangford Lough, Upper Lough Erne in Fermanagh, the Mourne Mountains and the Causeway Coast. The implementation of the sites was not difficult. The landowners were interested in the financial rewards, tax advantages and compensation.



The approach of the UK towards recreation and tourism in Natura 2000 sites can be illustrated by a few key publications. 'Natura 2000, conservation through partnership' states that wildlife can also be a visitor attraction, e.g. watching dolphins in Scotland, sea bird colonies on the Farne islands and red kites in Wales. The UK Marine SAC's LIFE project was a four year partnership project to establish management schemes on 12 candidate marine sites. One of the publications from this project was a review of the effects of recreational interactions within marine sites, for example

Strangford Lough. This sea lough contains a huge variety of marine habitats and species. Its proximity to Belfast provides recreational opportunity for a large population: boating, windsurfing, diving, jet skiing, wildfowling, walking, cycling and horse riding. In preparing the management scheme the potential impacts of different forms of recreation were reviewed. This gave a good picture of the susceptibility of different aspects of the site to new recreational developments. This information was made available to developers, planners and site managers through the published management scheme. A simpler summary was produced for the general public. The management scheme has been used for a number of purposes, including assessment of development proposals. In the last year a planning application for a marina within Strangford Lough was refused.

Other key messages are: information to the public can encourage considerate behaviour. Voluntary controls and codes of conduct are essential for the management of recreational activities. Statutory regulations and environmental impact assessment are necessary tools for the planner and environmental manager in Natura 2000 sites.

And finally: We need more information and guidance on what constitutes sustainable tourism development in protected areas in general and Natura 2000 sites in particular.

Visit Scotland

Tourism in Scotland is worth £4.5b and employs in excess of 200,000 people – 5%GDP and 9% of the Scottish workforce. Tourism pays the wages of more people than the oil/gas and whisky industries combined and employs x 4 more than agriculture and fishing.

Sustainable tourism is a key driver of economic activity across Scotland and sustains many small businesses and remote rural and island communities. Tourism cannot, however, operate in isolation and requires a vibrant and dynamic countryside where farming, forestry, fishing and aquaculture combine to produce a healthy living and working economic and social environment within which tourism can prosper.

It is the richness and diversity of Scotland's landscape, habitats, species and culture that contributes significantly to Scotland's quality tourism product – Scotland has 238 candidate SACs and 140 classified SPAs which combine to produce 325 Natura sites covering some 11% of the land area of Scotland.

VisitScotland is regarded as a “competent authority” under the provisions of the EC Habitats and Birds Directives in the exercising of its functions. Under the provisions of the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, VisitScotland is obliged “to further the conservation of biodiversity”. Mindful of its obligations and responsibilities under legislation and driven by the need to deliver sustainable tourism, VisitScotland has (with partners) engaged in a number of related projects:

- Wildlife Scotland brochure and wildlife website: <http://wildlife.visitscotland.com>
- European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas – Cairngorms National Park and Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park.
- Wild Scotland – private sector operators group.
- Northern Periphery Programme Nature Based Tourism Project.
- Green Tourism Business Scheme – www.green-business.co.uk.
- Tourism and Environment Forum – Sustainable Tourism Statement.
- Scottish Biodiversity Forum – A Strategy for the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in Scotland.
- Scottish Coastal Forum – A Strategy for Scotland's Coast and Inshore Waters.

Good practices

- The Caledonia Pinewood of Abernethy Forest near Aviemore located within the Cairngorms National Park. The Loch Garten Osprey Centre, operated by RSPB Scotland which as well as highlighting the intrinsic value of the pinewoods, focuses upon the live viewing of both the Osprey and the Capercaillie. Significant employment and economic spin-off for the local communities.
- The Peatlands of the North of Scotland – the largest single expanse of blanket bog in the world and proposed World Heritage Site. Focus upon the Forsinard Visitor Centre – operated by RSPB Scotland and highlighting the live viewing of Hen Harriers. Again significant local economic impact.
- Bass Rock – world class wildlife spectacle (80,000 gannets) and links (both through live pictures and by boat trips) to Scottish SeaBird Centre, North Berwick near Edinburgh. Focus upon the SeaBird Centre and role as leader in technology, wildlife interpretation and community linkages – economic regeneration of North Berwick.

The Loch Garten Visitor Centre and the Scottish SeaBird Centre have both achieved Gold Awards under the Green Tourism Business Scheme, and the Forsinard Visitor Centre and the SeaBird Centre are both served by public transport (trains).

In conclusion: whilst there was one very high profile dispute based upon Natura 2000 and Leisure, the situation in Scotland is one of partnership and progress where upon the spectacular and varied natural environment and wildlife provide a very strong focus for sustainable tourism.

For more information:

<http://www.visitscotland.com/>

<http://www.scotexchange.net/>

Look at www.stichtingrecreatie.nl/iep for the powerpoint presentation of Neil Black

3 TOURISM AND NATURE

3.1 Excursion to the habitat area 'Geuldal'

Organised by the province of Limburg, ing. Martijn Valk



South Limburg is densely populated and an important tourist region. City dwellers and tourists put major pressure on the landscape. The area is designated as a National Landscape with natural features, particularly in stream valleys and wooded slopes. There is a relatively large number of small farming communities, where tourism is the key source of income. Campsites and bungalow parks are situated mainly in the stream valleys and on the plateaus. In many cases an investment in quality is required, which demands space.

Although there are no conflicts now, potential conflicts with Natura 2000, the National Ecological Network (NEN), the Provincial Ecological Network and the environment and water management are looming. Based on current policy 76 percent of the campsites and bungalow parks are not permitted to expand, or only under very tight restrictions.

Possible solutions are: enhancing operations with current limitations (not always possible); selling or moving the business (very expensive); and the NEN balance approach (weighing up the interests of nature against intended development).

At campsite 'Het Geuldal' (lower Geul Valley) site management, local and provincial authorities and water board collaborated in a nature development project. 4 hectares of former farmland were turned into nature and the campsite was extended from 4,4 to 6 hectares. Thus a section of NEN was created, but part of it is a campsite. The campsite brings people in contact with nature, but also constitutes a barrier for nature. There is more space for nature, but the thick vegetation is negative for the campsite.

Campsite 'Den Driesch' (Valkenburg) has converted from a youth campsite to a campsite for families and senior citizens. This was part of the local authority's quality incentives for tourism. The campsite was allowed to expand to neighbouring farmland, with partial nature compensation. The campsite owner stated that if he had known beforehand that this process would take so much time (1999-2004/5) he would not have agreed to this project. The lack of communication between local and provincial authorities was the main problem. To tackle this the province will open a helpdesk for these kinds of procedures.

In the Gulp Valley agriculture is operating for the benefit of nature and tourism. Farming is in decline, but 'cows in the meadow' are an important selling point for tourists. The cows are now subsidised by an agricultural nature management program.

In Maastricht a new city park just opened in the valley of the river Jeker. It is an extension of an old city park and provides a walkway from the city centre to the habitat area in the Jeker valley. The project was co-financed by the local and national government and the EC Greenways programme. The remains of an old fortification are a prominent part of the park.



3.2 Welcome to Maastricht

By Wim Hazeu, alderman of Maastricht



Maastricht is hemmed in by four areas protected under the Bird and Habitat Directives: the Grensmaas, Geuldal, Pietersberg/Jekerdal and Savelsbos. From the 150 endangered species on the 'red list' more than 125 live in these areas, e.g. the badger, hamster, wall lizard, several bat species and a couple of eagle owls that nest in the marl pit of the ENCI cement industry.

Maastricht welcomes more than 15 million visitors each year. Half a million of them stay for more than one day and occasionally visit the parks and nature reserves.

Many of these are within walking distance from the city centre.

For centuries urban expansion was limited to its existing area and the landscape outside the city walls remained untouched. Even now project developments are planned on former industrial sites. Unfortunately, a decade ago a biologist started an experiment with the wall lizard in remote areas, with consequences for the entire urban planning. Another example regards the hamster. It disappeared from this region a decade ago as a result of changing agricultural production. After a breeding programme, fields were bought and planted. Farmers are now again growing 20 ha of grain and sunflowers for hamsters, having brought back the hamster a year ago.

In order to look after all the different habitats and create win-win solutions Maastricht seeks co-operation with organisations such as the Nature Conservancy Organisation "Natuurmonumenten", the National Forestry "Staatsbosbeheer" and the Regional Landscape "Limburgs Landschap". For the next ten years a budget of 10 million euro has been reserved for the development and maintenance of natural sites within city boundaries. On top of this Maastricht was able to get another 2,5 million of funding from the European Committee in the past two years, for special projects. With European money for the historic site of the Hoge Fronten both the recreational use and the vegetation are being improved. Near the Geuldal a vineyard is planned on an ecological basis combined with recreational land use by restoring the historic landscape of traditional country houses and estates.

4 WORKSHOPS

4.1 Communication

Chair: Ella de Hullu, Manager at the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality



Communication not only means information and marketing but also round table discussions. Communication has to be targeted at different groups: citizens, stakeholders, local and regional authorities, and visitors. It must be adapted to the three stages of the Natura 2000 process: designation, development of management plans and regular management operations. So far the designation phase of Natura 2000 has had a negative impact (we already start at a minus 5 position). It was top-down, not bottom-up. These mistakes can be overcome in new communication plans and in the new member states.

Lessons

Communication experts are needed in this process, not scientists.

Communication/information has to be 'sold' to different target groups through different channels (for example the German Sports Associations brochure).

An external facilitator is needed to avoid negative attitudes with the stakeholders and to solve the minus 5 attitude.

It is important to communicate the added value and enhanced quality of Natura 2000. Natura 2000 means good quality and economic success (more visitors, more income). The added value for the visitor is more quality achieved through sustainable management.

Regional and local governments are the driving force. They must be convinced of the value and interest of Natura 2000 for the community/region. Use ambassadors who can spread the word about the good practices and experiences (e.g. mayor to mayor, entrepreneur to entrepreneur).

Actions needed

- Take stock of problems and lessons learned in the context of NATURA 2000 and tourism, sports, leisure
- Take stock of good practices, including information/communication tools, from all European countries
- Distribute/make available the good practices to all countries through Expert Centres in the member states, the EU Natura 2000 Communications Workgroup, newsletters and web sites

4.2 Planning

Chair: Kees de Ruiter, Head of Department at the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality



Management plans could serve as bridges to bring nature conservation and leisure management together. All countries plan differently but there are some general issues.

Management plans

- The legal basis of management plans is Article 6 of the Habitat Directives. There are three approaches: sustainable management plans, existing plans made Natura 2000 proof and finally simple conservation plans.

Recommendations:

- Ensure the plans optimise both development and conservation.
- The plans should be tailor made.

Organisation of the management plans

Two different approaches are: reactive (responding to development proposals) and proactive (engaging with stakeholders)

Recommendations:

- A tourist strategy is needed as input into the management plan
- Exchange information
- Local stakeholders should participate
- Partners must have a clear vision
- The process must not be protracted
- Use examples of good practice and past experiences

Abundance of designations

This is a very complicated world. A problem for the administration need not be a burden for citizens.

Recommendations:

- Integrate all nature conservation designations into one management plan
- If possible, integrate other aspects into management, for example zoning for different recreational activities.
- Encourage co-operation and communication between public servants.

General conclusions

- Recreational measures can be in the interest of nature
- Organise meetings between conservationists and 'guide producers'
- Heritage can be seen as 'jewels in the crown'
- Helpdesk for information and training
- Be realistic
- Sitemanagers can keep us on the sustainable path in day-by-day decisions
- 1 plan means: 1 message, 1 label/logo

4.3 Discussion

Nature and recreation need each other, but because of bad communication they think they are enemies.

Problems usually occur on a local level. Getting together and discussing problems with an external facilitator is essential.

Nature is meant not just for conservation but also for recreation and sustainable tourism. It would be real progress to recognise sustainable tourism in protected and non-protected nature areas.

The EC Communication group Natura 2000 can help focus on good practices.

Communication on the Agenda 21 for managing local sites will be evaluated by the end of 2004. The conclusions of this expert meeting, e.g. the possibilities to facilitate networking, can be taken into account in the internal paper.

The Stichting Recreatie, expert centre on leisure and recreation, could collect good practices and thereby facilitate the communication process.

4.4 Conclusions

This expert meeting should be continued in the spring of 2005 to exchange new experiences and learn from each other.

Good practices should be taken stock of, also from the new member states.

Other countries should be invited to join this initiative; not only densely populated countries.

The meeting of the Habitat committee (the advisory committee of all countries present in the EC) in September 2004 is a good occasion to communicate the results of this expertmeeting and invite other member states to join in.



5 CLOSURE OF THE EXPERT MEETING

By André van der Zande, director-general of the Dutch ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality



This European expert meeting on Natura 2000 and leisure has been a very special one. Over the last few days we have shared knowledge and exchanged experiences.

The participating countries are all in line with each other in the effort to combine nature and tourism. Although the conflicts cannot be denied, we have found constructive ways to deal with them, for example:

- the zoning in Flanders relieves nature and at the same time gives possibilities to recreation
- the tax advantages in the Walloon regions and the Netherlands
- the pilot committees for Natura 2000 areas in France

Partnerships between nature and recreation can give a boost to both. Although there may of course still be conflicts, such as in Strangford Lough, Northern Ireland, this intensely used Natura 2000 site shows that there are limits to what is sustainable for nature. A proposal for a new marina has been rejected. The example of the Bavarian Alps shows that there is a need for management plans, in which the attraction of it being a ski resort has to be balanced with the very sensitive natural values.

This expert meeting has shown us many examples that can be used on a greater European scale, and are also applicable to the ambitions of the Netherlands. The Netherlands aim for a balanced approach to economic, ecological and social cultural issues. The two basic principles of our (international) nature and leisure policies are sustainability and responsibility. As outlined in the Dutch presentation, the case of the Veluwe area is an example of this. Here, sustainability and shared responsibility can be seen in the integral approach, where many diverging interests are combined. This interpretation of the requirements of the Habitat directive in which an entire area is considered for its consequences, opens up new opportunities.

Other examples are:

From the start the National Parks in the Netherlands had policies for recreational usage and a professional communication approach. All parks are open to many forms of leisure, such as hiking, cycling and canoeing. There are even special arrangements for the disabled, like a hiking route with signs in braille.

The parks in the Walloon region of Belgium where wooden hiking tracks for disabled people have been set up, as well as high viewing towers. The example of the Tourism Agency 'Visit Scotland' that was given responsibility for biodiversity as well.

Taking stock of good practices is a good start. This shows that the EU is not annoying, but that it challenges. The approach of the LEADER projects can be very instructive. It also provides best practices and has a committee of practice. We should ask the EC if the LEADER approach is suitable for Natura 2000 and how we can use this approach as guidance.

I have a vision of European citizens spending their holidays and leisure time going from one Natura 2000 area to another. The Natura 2000 network will be properly linked up and be used by animals and people. Initiatives in which special trains ride from cities to Natura 2000 areas – such as in Denmark and Germany – or in which school children can win journeys to Natura 2000 areas in neighboring countries, as proposed in the Czech Republic, will have spawned similar creative actions all over Europe.

I hope that in the Spring of 2005 another inspiring meeting will follow!

PROGRAMME EXPERT MEETING NATURA 2000 AND LEISURE

Wednesday May 26th

Welcome

From 16.00 h	Arrival of the participants
18.00 h	Welcome participants in St. Gerlach by Juliska Klüppel, managing director of “Stichting Recreatie”, Expert Centre on Recreation and Leisure
18.15 h	Welcome by the owner of St. Gerlach (Camille Oostwegel)
18.30 h	Informal acquaintance and dinner
Evening	Time off, possibility to take a walk in the local Natura 2000 area “Geuldal”(St. Gerlach lies in this area)

Thursday May 27th Natura 2000 and leisure: transfer of knowledge

08.45-09.00 h	Welcome in meeting hall
09.00-09.20 h	Official start expert meeting; welcome by Chair Kees de Ruiter, Head of the Rural Environment Department of the Netherlands Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality
09.20-09.50 h	Introduction to the European Policies
09.50-11.00 h	Every country gives a short presentation (max. 20 minutes) about its approach of the subject Natura 2000 and Leisure First round: 1. Belgium, Flemish Region 2. France
11.00-11.20 h	Coffee break
11.20-12.30 h	Second round: 3. Germany 4. Netherlands
12.30-14.00 h	Lunch
14.00-15.10 h	Third round: 5. Belgium, Walloon Region 6. United Kingdom
15.10-15.30 h	Selection of themes for the Friday workshops
15.30-19.00 h	Excursion to the Natura 2000 area “Geuldal”, organised by the Province of Limburg
19.00 h	Dinner at Château Neercanne, welcome by Wim Hazeu, alderman of Maastricht

Friday May 28th

Natura 2000 and leisure: discussion

08.45-09.00 h	Summary first day inclusive themes for the workshops
09.00-10.45 h	Working together for nature and leisure Two workshops (in 2 groups) about solutions and good practices
10.45-11.00 h	Coffee break
11.00-12.00 h	Presentation of the results of the workshops (2 x 15 minutes) and plenary discussion
12.00-12.15 h	Coffee break
12.15-12.45 h	Conclusions of the expert meeting by Kees de Ruiter
12:45-13:00 h	Closure of the expert meeting by André van der Zande, Director-General of the Netherlands Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality
13.00-14.30 h	Lunch
14.30 h	Distribution of the communiqué
From 14.30 h	Participants are free to leave for home

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