

# European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas

## The Charter



## CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Charter in brief</b> .....	<b>4</b>
	2.1 Developing sustainable tourism .....	4
	2.2 Promoting partnerships.....	4
	2.3 A strategic approach.....	5
	2.4 Charter structure .....	5
<b>3</b>	<b>Charter Part I: for the protected area</b> .....	<b>6</b>
	3.1 Benefits .....	6
	3.2 How to gain Charter status.....	6
	3.3 Key issues to address.....	7
	3.4 Ratification .....	10
	3.5 Evaluation and renewal.....	11
<b>4</b>	<b>Charter Part II: for tourism businesses</b> .....	<b>12</b>
	4.1 Benefits to businesses.....	12
	4.2 European Charter partnership programme .....	13
	4.3 General principles for implementation.....	14
	4.4 Commitments of the protected area .....	14
	4.5 Commitments of the tourism business .....	15
	4.6 European Charter partnership agreement .....	15
	4.7 Validation of the Charter protected area's methodology .....	16
	4.8 Signing the European Charter partnership agreement.....	16
<b>5</b>	<b>Charter Part III: for companies organising tours</b> .....	<b>18</b>
	5.1 Benefits for travel companies.....	18
	5.2 Undertaking by the travel company.....	18
	<b>Appendix 1: Charter Principles</b> .....	<b>22</b>

**The Charter is one of a set of three publications. The other two are *How to join the journey: a guide for protected areas* and the *Application report: framework and guidance*. Together the trio forms guidance on how to become a member of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism.**

For further details on the Charter see also [www.european-charter.org](http://www.european-charter.org)

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### **Impressum**

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The EUROPARC Federation represents around 450 members including protected areas (such as national parks, nature parks, AONBs and biosphere reserves), governmental departments, NGOs and businesses in 36 countries. The Federation is a pan-European, politically independent, non-governmental organisation, whose purpose is to support and promote the full range of protected areas in Europe. The Federation is winner of the World of TUI Environmental Award 2001.

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# 1 Introduction

## From the ground up

**To be a “chartered” protected area is to be part of a journey of development, a continuous quest for successful, sustainable sharing of these magical spaces.**

Carefully built from the ground up, after much shared thinking, this Charter explains how to implement the concept of sustainable development in some of Europe’s most treasured places. It is itself an ongoing process: its first stage, part I, has now been successfully operating for a decade with almost 80 protected areas having been awarded the Charter; part II has had a brilliant start in many Charter areas which are involving more and more business enterprises; and part III is in development.

Defined as “development that meets the needs of present generations, without compromising the capacity of future generations to meet their needs”<sup>1</sup>, sustainability involves the preservation of resources for future generations, viable economic development and equitable social development.

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas reflects the world-wide and European priorities expressed in the recommendations of Agenda 21 adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, and by the European Union in its 6th Environment Action Programme and Strategy for Sustainable Development.

The Charter belongs to the EUROPARC Federation, the umbrella organisation of protected areas in Europe. It was developed by a European group representing protected areas, the tourism industry and partners, under the EUROPARC umbrella, and builds on the recommendations of the 1993 EUROPARC study *Loving Them to Death? Sustainable Tourism in Europe’s Nature and National Parks*<sup>2</sup>. The Charter was one of the priorities defined in the World Conservation Union’s action programme for protected areas in Europe, *Parks for Life* (1994).

The growing importance of sustainable tourism development as an area of international concern has been underlined by the recent elaboration of international guidelines for sustainable tourism under the Convention on Biological Diversity. The European Charter directly addresses key principles of these international guidelines, and represents a practical tool for their implementation at the regional level of protected areas.

This, the full version of the Charter text, is accompanied by two allied documents. Together, these three documents: *The Charter*; *How to join the journey: a guide for protected areas* and the *Application report: framework and guidance* form a rigorous framework for the development of sustainable tourism in Europe’s protected areas

<sup>1</sup> *Our common future* Brundtland report, World Commission on Environment and Development

<sup>2</sup> First published 1993, republished 2001, by EUROPARC Federation, Grafenau, Germany



## 2 Charter in brief

### 2.1 Developing sustainable tourism

The underlying aims of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism are:

- ▶ to increase awareness of, and support for, Europe's protected areas as a fundamental part of our heritage, that should be preserved for and enjoyed by current and future generations;
- ▶ to improve the sustainable development and management of tourism in protected areas, which takes account of the needs of the environment, local residents, local businesses and visitors.

The Charter reflects the wish of authorities managing protected areas, of local stakeholders and representatives of the tourism business, to support and encourage tourism that accords with the principles of sustainable development.

It commits the signatories to implementing a local strategy for sustainable tourism defined as: "any form of tourism development, management or activity which ensures the long-term protection and preservation of natural, cultural and social resources and contributes in a positive and equitable manner to the economic development and well-being of individuals living, working, or staying in protected areas".

In order to put this form of tourism into practice, it is necessary to take a global view of tourism in and around a protected area, to engage in a process of wide consultation, and to strengthen the positive interactions between tourism and other economic sectors in the area.

Finally, the aim of this type of tourism is to respond to the expectations of European visitors by making travel meaningful, by allowing time to explore and meet other people, and to gain from the experience by giving something of oneself.

### 2.2 Promoting partnerships

The Charter recognises that protected-area authorities should not work alone in the management of tourism, but rather that all those affected by tourism in and around a protected area should be involved in its development and management.

Signatories to the Charter agree to adopt working methods based on partnership. This will apply to every stage of activity, from development of a sustainable tourism programme to its implementation. It will take the form of clear agreements and co-operation between the protected-area authorities, tourist service providers, and local people.

The Charter is a tool for putting this partnership into practice. It encourages the sharing of responsibilities and outlines the individual and collective commitments of the protected area and its partners.

## 2.3 A strategic approach

Subscribing to the Charter means taking a strategic approach to sustainable tourism development in protected areas: making a diagnosis; consulting and involving partners; establishing strategic objectives; allocating the appropriate resources; following through an action plan, and evaluating the results.

In order to subscribe to the Charter, candidates must draw up a sustainable tourism development strategy and commit themselves to an agreed action plan for the area.

## 2.4 Charter structure

The Charter has grown in three distinct but interlinked areas of development of sustainable tourism:

### **Part I: for the protected area**

For individual protected areas of all kinds. Implementation by the protected-area authority entails carrying out a diagnosis of the needs of the area (problems and opportunities) recognised and accepted by local partners. The aim of this approach is to find the most appropriate future direction for tourism throughout the whole area. The strategy subsequently proposed by the protected area within the context of the Charter must be developed and implemented in partnership with local tourism representatives, other business sectors, local people and authorities.

***Current position:** Part I is fully implemented in almost 80 protected areas of varied European countries. Protected areas which fulfil the requirements may apply to become full signatories or members of the European Charter and receive the formal recognition which goes with this. The procedures governing this process are tested and in place.*

### **Part II: for local tourism businesses**

For securing the involvement of tourism businesses in protected areas. Local businesses are vital partners of the protected-area authority for development of the area's tourism strategy and must be involved in this process as described in Charter Part I (see above).

Part II envisages taking this involvement a stage further, enabling tourism businesses working with the protected-area authority to receive individual recognition as Charter signatories. This will entail a diagnosis by the respective business of all its activity, i.e. the balance between what is on offer and what visitors expect, and measures to be taken to enhance the local heritage. The environment and sustainable development should also be taken into account in the running of the business. The business will formulate its own ideas for sustainable tourism and their practical application, in partnership with the protected area.

***Current position:** Part II was approved in May 2007 and has begun its implementation in protected areas of varied European countries. Many business enterprises have already become Charter partners and the number is growing fast.*

### **Part III: for tour operators**

For securing the involvement of tour operators who incorporate the principles of sustainable development into their tourism product, and who are organising tours to and within protected areas. Tour operators working under this framework will agree to work in partnership with the authority responsible for the strategy in the protected area and the local tourist-service providers. This will involve analysing the compatibility of its products with the objectives of the area. The visitor flow they attract to an area must not destroy the heritage resources that the tourists come to see.

***Current position:** Part III is under development. A number of individual pilot initiatives are taking place.*



## 3 Charter Part I: for the protected area

**Tourism offers a privileged means of raising environmental awareness among the general public. It also represents a valuable opportunity to support traditional economic activities and to improve the quality of life.**

In order to meet the needs of the protected areas as well as the expectations of European visitors, it is essential that tourism preserves the environment on which its activity is based.

By subscribing to the Charter, the protected area chooses to adopt tourism development that is compatible with the principles of sustainable development. It agrees to favour a coherent approach to projects within its own area and to take a long-term view of the management of the area.

The protected area prioritises co-operation and the sharing of responsibilities in order to improve the effectiveness of its mission to protect the environment.

### 3.1 Benefits

Fundamentally, protected areas which meet the requirements of the Charter will benefit from the economic, social and environmental advantages of well-managed, sustainable tourism.

The Charter also gives participating protected areas:

- a basis for strengthening relationships with local tourism stakeholders and the wider tourism industry;
- the opportunity to influence tourism development in the area;
- a higher profile in the European arena as an area devoted to sustainable tourism;
- public-relations and awareness-raising opportunities with visitors and local and national media;
- an opportunity to work with and learn from other European Charter areas in the Charter network;
- helpful internal and external assessment, leading to new ideas and improvements;
- greater credibility amongst potential funding partners.

### 3.2 How to gain Charter status

The undertaking by the authority responsible for the protected area falls into four main areas:

- i. accepting the principles;
- ii. involving partners;
- iii. defining a strategy and
- iv. developing an action plan.

These areas of work, followed by the key issues which should be addressed when shaping them, are detailed below.

- i. To accept and abide by the principles for sustainable development as set out in this Charter, whilst adapting them to the local context.**
- ii. To involve all those implicated by tourism, in and around the protected area, in its development and management.**

In order to ensure sustainable tourism development, the protected area will organise public consultation meetings, and will set up a permanent forum or equivalent arrangement between all those directly concerned: the protected area authority, local municipalities, conservation and community organisations and representatives of the tourism industry. Links with relevant regional and national bodies should be developed and maintained. The protected area will thus facilitate a process of co-operation, enabling local tourism businesses and other sectors to work together, encouraging better integration of tourism in the local lifestyle and better understanding of sustainable development objectives by local people.

- iii. To define a medium-term strategy (5 years) for sustainable tourism development in its area.**

The aim of the strategy is to improve the quality of the tourism product while taking into account the conservation and sustainable development objectives of the area. It guarantees the best possible integration of tourism within the natural, cultural, economic, and social environment, and its coherent development in time and space.

The strategy should be based on careful consultation and be approved and understood by local stakeholders. It should contain:

- a definition of the area to be influenced by the strategy, which may extend outside the protected area;
- an assessment of the area's natural, historic and cultural heritage, tourism infrastructure, and economic and social circumstances, considering issues of capacity, need and potential opportunity;
- an assessment of current visitors and potential future markets;
- a set of strategic objectives for the development and management of tourism, covering:
  - conservation and enhancement of the environment and heritage,
  - economic and social development,
  - preservation and improvement of the quality of life of local residents,
  - visitor management and enhancement of the quality of tourism offered;
- an indication of the resource allocation and partners for implementation of the strategy, the sharing of tasks, and the order of priorities;
- proposals for monitoring the strategy (methods and indicators).

- iv. To present this strategy in the form of an action plan**

The action plan specifies the measures which have been or will be taken to achieve the objectives established in the strategy. It covers the five-year period of the strategy, and defines the commitment of the partners to each of the Charter's key issues.

### 3.3 Key issues to address

Each protected area is different. Strategic priorities and action programmes should be determined locally, using the participatory approach described above. However, the Charter requires that the following key issues be addressed.

## i. Protection and enhancement of natural and cultural heritage

A fundamental aim of the strategy and action plan is to protect and enhance the area's natural and cultural heritage, for and through tourism, and to protect it from excessive tourism development. This will involve:

- **Monitoring impact on flora and fauna and controlling tourism in sensitive locations:** Based on the results of monitoring, specific measures will be introduced to ensure tourism development remains within the carrying capacity of the environment of the area. Certain areas may not be open to the public due to their fragile nature.
- **Encouraging activities, including tourism uses, which support the maintenance of historic heritage, culture and traditions:** The tourism development of the area will value its cultural and historical heritage. Measures, equipment and facilities will be provided to encourage public access and activities based on this heritage.
- **Preserving natural resources:** Measures will be taken to control and reduce activities, including tourism impacts, which adversely affect the quality of landscapes, air and water; use non-renewable energy; and create unnecessary waste and noise. Co-operation with local authorities will be sought for the development of water, energy and land management programmes.
- **Encouraging visitors and the tourism industry to contribute to conservation:** Schemes will be devised for tourism to contribute to the conservation, maintenance and enhancement of the natural and cultural heritage. Voluntary subscription schemes which involve visitors, tourism businesses and other partners in this task are encouraged.

## ii. Improving the quality of the tourism experience

A key goal is to provide all visitors with a high-quality experience in all aspects of their visit. The protected area will carry out a programme with its partners to improve the quality of the tourism which it offers. This will involve:

- **Researching the expectations and satisfaction of existing and potential visitors:** It is important to develop a marketing approach, to gain an understanding of the expectations and requirements of current and potential visitors. This will help produce a better match between supply and demand. Tourism products and activities should be designed for clearly identified markets as well as meeting the objectives of conservation. Furthermore, the protected area will seek to identify new visitors who are sensitive to the quality of the environment.
- **Meeting the special needs of disadvantaged visitors:** The protected area will pay particular attention to certain types of visitor who are often overlooked by other destinations such as disabled, ill or convalescing people, young people and low-income groups. Any form of elitism is to be avoided so far as visitor access is concerned.
- **Supporting initiatives to check and improve the quality of facilities and services:** Initiatives will be taken to achieve quality in every aspect of the tourism experience: visitor centres, tourist equipment and facilities, all visitor services, tourist products, marketing and promotion - and last, but not least, after-sales service. The protected area will strive to assure quality in its own facilities and services, and to support quality initiatives for the services provided by its partners.

### iii. Raising public awareness

The protected area will seek to communicate effectively to visitors about the special qualities of the area. This should be achieved by:

- **Ensuring that the promotion of the area is based on authentic images and is sensitive to needs and capacity at different times and in different places:** Promotion and marketing of the protected area can help increase visitors' awareness of the authentic values of the area and the principles of sustainable tourism development. Care will be taken that the way the area is promoted reflects and supports visitor management aims.
- **Providing readily available and good quality visitor information in and around the area:** High-quality information will be readily accessible for visitors and the local community, highlighting both the outstanding richness and sensitivity of the natural environment as well as the tourist resources available. The public will also be kept informed of heritage conservation and sustainable development objectives. Furthermore, the protected area will ensure that tourism businesses receive a regular supply of information for their clients (leaflets, maps, etc.).
- **Providing educational facilities and services which interpret the area's environment and heritage to visitors and local people:** Environmental education and heritage interpretation will constitute a priority in the area's tourism policy. Activities or facilities based on cultural heritage and the environment will be offered to visitors, local people and particularly to young visitors and to school groups. The protected area will also help tourism businesses to include an educational element in their activities.

### iv. Development of tourism specific to the area

The protected area will encourage specific tourism products which enable discovery and understanding of the area, by providing and supporting activities, events and packages involving the interpretation of nature and heritage.

### v. Training

Training will be an essential tool for implementing the sustainable tourism development strategy in the area. The aim is to increase knowledge of the protected area and sustainability issues amongst all those involved in tourism. This will be achieved by providing or supporting training programmes for staff of the protected area, other organisations and tourism enterprises. The action plan will include training programmes to benefit different target groups, with particular regard to the organisation of seminars on the local environment for the tourism businesses. Training activities will be based on an analysis of the training needs of the area.

### vi. Protection and support of the quality of life for local residents

The tourism strategy will seek to ensure that tourism supports and does not reduce the quality of life of local residents. This will be achieved by:

- **Involving local communities in the planning of tourism in the area:** The protected area will work closely with local communities for the development and implementation of its tourism strategy and action plan.
- **Ensuring good communication between the protected area, local people and visitors:** The protected area will foster the promotion of exchange and contact between local residents and visitors. This includes keeping local communities and businesses informed of activities and public events being organised in the protected area.

- **Identifying and seeking to reduce any conflicts which may arise.**

### vii. Social and economic development

The protected area will aim to increase benefits from tourism to the local economy, encouraging initiatives which will have a positive impact on various economic sectors. These will include:

- **Promoting the purchase of local products by visitors and local tourism businesses:** Local food and crafts as well as local services will be promoted. Schemes will be developed to raise the profile and facilitate the distribution of the area's typical produce.
- **Encouraging the employment of local people in tourism:** The protected area will support the promotion of new forms of employment in tourism. In the field of training and job creation, it will favour versatility and social integration with due regard to the needs of women, those in difficult economic circumstances and disabled people.

### viii. Control of tourist numbers

Visitor flows will be monitored and influenced to reduce negative impacts on the environment, landscape and heritage of the area. This will involve:

- **Keeping a record of visitor numbers over time and space:** Schemes to monitor and analyse visitor numbers will be put in place as the basis for adapting methods of visitor management. Feedback from local tourism enterprises will be included in the data collected.
- **Creating and implementing a visitor management plan:** A strategic approach will be taken to visitor management, including measures to channel visitor flows and regulate visitor activities in the protected area. The location of tourism amenities, the planning of discovery trails and the provision of information and interpretation will all contribute to visitor management, with the aim of preserving the natural, cultural and social environment and the quality of the visitor experience. Effective visitor management planning should allow an increase in economic contribution from tourism whilst reducing the disadvantage of seasonality.
- **Promoting use of public transport, cycling and walking as an alternative to private cars:** Promotional activities will be carried out to encourage the use of public transport both for access to the protected area and within its boundaries. The reduction of traffic by private vehicles, as well as the promotion of cycling and walking will be a priority.
- **Controlling the siting and style of any new tourism development:** Preference will be given to the renovation of existing buildings rather than to the construction of new ones. Guidelines should be made available to ensure the appropriate design and management of facilities in the protected area. The use of local materials and reflection of architectural traditions is a priority.

## 3.4 Ratification

Protected areas which have fulfilled the requirements are invited to apply for recognition by the EUROPARC Federation as a member of the European Charter, or "Charter area", sometimes also called "Charter protected area". Details of the application and evaluation procedure are described in *How to join the journey: a guide for protected areas*, available from the EUROPARC Federation.

After a protected area has submitted its application it needs to be evaluated and verified. This includes an evaluation visit to the area by an independent sustainable tourism expert appointed by EUROPARC. After that, the Evaluation Committee for the European Charter will assess the verifier's report to ensure the protected area's commitment to the sustainable tourism

development process, its co-operation with local partners, the quality of its strategy and action plan.

The strategy and the action plan which are part of the application dossier must meet both the requirements laid down by the Charter and the local needs revealed by the diagnosis.

Upon successful verification a certificate will be awarded, which is signed by both the authority responsible for managing the protected area and the EUROPARC Federation. With its signature the protected area reaffirms its commitment to further co-operation with local partners, to implement the agreed strategy and action plan, and to continue striving for excellence in the management of tourism in its region.

### 3.5 Evaluation and renewal

The protected area will monitor and evaluate the results of its strategy. After five years it will submit a detailed report on these to the Evaluation Committee for the European Charter. As part of the process for renewal of Charter membership, usually referred to as “re-evaluation”, the protected area will be visited again by a sustainable tourism expert for a re-evaluation of the area’s achievements and the efforts being made to reach its fixed objectives.

The procedure for renewing commitment to the Charter will involve development of a new 5-year strategy and action plan. Renewal of membership by the EUROPARC Federation will be subject to satisfactory progress over the past 5 years.





## 4 Charter Part II: for tourism businesses

**The aim of Charter Part II<sup>3</sup> is to strengthen links and deepen understanding between protected-area managers and their partners in the business community<sup>4</sup> in and around the area. Through the development of partnerships, sustainable tourism satisfies the needs of visitors, businesses and local communities without damaging the environment now or for the future. Tourism can make a positive contribution to a healthy, mixed economy, which utilises and develops local skills and resources.**

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas is an award to protected areas that have demonstrated partnership working, developed and implemented a tourism strategy based on the area's special qualities, as well as following a resourced work plan to address sustainability issues.

To maximise mutual benefits, close collaboration between the "partners" (local tourism businesses, tourist service providers, travel companies, tour operators, other social and economic local stakeholders, protected-area managers) is essential and to assist in this a flexible approach is encouraged in each protected area. It will be necessary to reflect individual or local circumstances when developing a European Charter partnership programme. It should be based around the Charter principles, i.e. using an integrated approach to sustainable development taking into account economic, social and environmental factors. A European Charter Partnership Agreement signed by the protected-area authority and the tourism business is a positive way of demonstrating mutual commitment.

### 4.1 Benefits to businesses

Commitment to the principles of sustainable tourism by, generally, private sector enterprises should be rewarded and it is reasonable that a business should be able to capitalise on its commitment to sustainability. Individual businesses often provide the interface between the consumer or tourist and the protected area. They can also provide a great source of knowledge and information to enhance the visitor's experience as well as influence their behaviour and attitudes.

A European Charter partnership programme, as a mutual commitment between the protected-area authority and individual businesses, will create multiple mutual benefits. The protected-area authority will achieve its long-term conservation objectives through sustainable use of the area. Businesses will increase and maintain profitability through:

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<sup>3</sup> General agreement on the principles underlying this text was reached at a meeting of the European Charter Park Network held in Strasbourg in June 2006, hosted by the Conseil Régional d'Alsace and the Association Rhin Vivant, and organised together with the Fédération des Parcs Naturels Régionaux de France and the EUROPARC Federation. Further developmental work was undertaken by a smaller group of European Charter area representatives during and after the meeting of Iberian Charter Parks held in Geres/Xures in November 2006.

<sup>4</sup> The concept "business" is used in the widest sense: every organisation, regardless of its legal status, public or private bodies, developing relevant products and services for visitors and the local community, and participating in the sustainable tourism strategy of the Charter area.

- i. increased visitor satisfaction and repeat bookings;
- ii. reducing operating costs through audit and sustainable use of resources (energy, water, etc.);
- iii. retaining visitor spend in the local economy through use of distinctive local food and other products as well as promoting local events, festivals and customs;
- iv. engagement with the protected-area staff and other local stakeholders in the joint development of the area's tourism strategy;
- v. examples of other benefits, such as being recognised at European level or developing new commercial opportunities, by:
  - targeting new customers attracted by the protected areas;
  - offering tourism based on discovery of the environment;
  - creating off-season tourism;
  - working with other economic sectors in the area and purchasing products and services locally;
  - receiving information on tourist numbers in the protected area and future forecasts of potential visitors;
  - better organisation and management in the area as a whole;
  - providing high-quality information about the protected area.

Additionally, the Charter can be a positive marketing tool by informing customers, with the help of marketing material and through good customer service, that a business is a credible partner with a protected area that has been awarded.

## 4.2 European Charter partnership programme

Local businesses are vital partners of the protected-area authority in the development of the area's sustainable tourism strategy and must be involved in its process. The Charter encourages and welcomes the involvement of local tourism businesses and tourist service providers that are based in or develop their activities in the Charter area as defined in Charter Part I.

Incorporating the Charter principles of sustainability into a wide cross-section of private sector tourism products and businesses is the goal. Part II of the Charter enables individual businesses in the tourism sector, working with the protected-area authority, to become recognised as European Charter Partners. A flexible partnership approach is encouraged which reflects the Charter principles, existing quality marks and eco-labels, differing local needs and varying situations, together with the commitment of the individual tourism sector business to sustainability.

Essentially, the partnership between any individual tourism sector business and the protected area requires commitment to<sup>5</sup>:

- i. an understanding of needs and the impact that tourist activity has on the natural environment;
- ii. a mutual agreement that tourism creates a positive contribution to the social and economic development of the area, thus contributing to a better place to live in for local people;
- iii. analysis and agreement of the compatibility of tourism products and services within the protected area to ensure they do not destroy the natural or cultural heritage;
- iv. a diagnosis by the respective business on all its activity. For example:
  - the balance between what is on offer and what visitors expect;
  - provision of local, protected area and environmental information (excellent customer service and ongoing staff training);

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<sup>5</sup> The actions within the model partnership agreement should correspond to these actions. Further guidelines will be developed by the Charter Network and EUROPARC Sections, drawing on the experience of protected areas that have already been working with businesses.

- a review of environmental consideration, energy and transport in the operation of the business;
- formulation of own ideas for environmental sustainability and their practical application, in line with the protected-area management plan;
- measures to encourage visitors to contribute positively through volunteering or visitor-payback to enhance the local heritage or natural environment.

### 4.3 General principles for implementation

Several key principles guiding the process to certify individual businesses as European Charter Partners have been identified. The process should:

- i. be a practical application of the Charter principles;
- ii. be based on an effective, mutually supportive and individually-tailored partnership between the protected area and the tourism business;
- iii. seek to ensure continuous improvements;
- iv. be based on an integrated approach to sustainable development, tackling together environmental, social and economic issues;
- v. be flexible enough to be adapted to the specific situation of each protected area (within local, regional and national context) whilst at the same time containing the requirements set at European level;
- vi. encourage protected areas to promote and support the engagement of businesses;
- vii. encourage businesses to promote and support the role of protected areas.

### 4.4 Commitments of the protected area

The protected area (or another organisation charged with and agreed during the implementation of part I of the Charter) will:

- provide EUROPARC with the documents of the protected-area requirements and other documentation stated in Chapter Eight<sup>6</sup>;
- provide the information needed for the application process of each business;
- verify that the businesses fulfil requirements set at both European and protected area level;
- verify the appropriate formulation of businesses commitments, and develop (together with the partner) indicators that will be used to verify how requirements are being fulfilled;
- state the protected-area commitments to businesses such as:
  - positive discrimination in favour of European Charter Partners in training and information campaigns of the protected area;
  - listing the European Charter Partners in promotional and information materials and activities of the protected area (web, brochures, visitor centres, fairs, etc.);
  - facilitate the relationship of the businesses with other public bodies;
  - active participation in the Charter area network and transmission of benefits to the European Charter Partners;
- state the conditions of use of the European Charter Partners corporate image;
- review and sign the agreement;
- evaluate the implementation of actions, at least every three years.

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<sup>6</sup> As stated in Chapter Eight, protected areas are responsible for their own Charter Part II proposal to EUROPARC. EUROPARC can make available to everyone existing texts from different sections or protected areas to assist other Charter areas when drawing up their own proposals. Meanwhile, each EUROPARC Section or national or regional Charter network is encouraged to work on their own guidelines.

## 4.5 Commitments of the tourism business

The tourism business needs to fulfil requirements<sup>7</sup> at two levels: at European level and at protected-area level. The European level will guarantee that all participating businesses comply with certain requirements and ensures commonality in implementation across Europe. The protected-area level enables protected areas to define requirements specific to their Charter area.

At European level, the following conditions are required of the tourism business:

- i. It should be located, or carry out its activities, in the Charter area as defined in Charter part I. Exceptions can be made if the protected area regards this as relevant for its sustainable tourism strategy.
- ii. It should fulfil any relevant legislation at the time of certification.
- iii. The activities of the tourism business should be compatible with the sustainable tourism strategy and the management plan of the protected area.
- iv. It should join and aim to participate in the activities promoted by the forum as defined in Part I of the Charter<sup>8</sup> in section 3.2.
- v. It should commit to working towards a European Charter partnership agreement with the protected area, where mutual commitments will be defined (objectives, actions) for a period of three years.

At protected-area level, the specific requirements for tourism businesses will be agreed by each protected area Charter Forum. Some examples are listed in Chapter Three.

## 4.6 European Charter partnership agreement

Using the protected area as the central focus will create positive attitudes and understanding between the authority, the numerous and varied tourism-sector businesses and their customers. This will be important in building and maintaining relationships as well as in marketing and promotional opportunities, e.g. website listings, training and networking plus a sense of shared ownership, management, strategic direction and common purpose.

To establish or further develop the commitment between the protected-area authority and its individual Charter business partners the signing of a European Charter partnership agreement should form the basic approach. A “model” agreement provided by EUROPARC shows the minimum content drawn from the principles listed in the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. The agreement identifies protected area and business commitments as well as setting out actions and monitoring indicators.

Making the partnership work in a simple, yet effective, way is vital. To become a European Charter Partner, an individual business should fulfil the requirements set at European level and protected-area level, follow the application process guidelines and sign the partnership agreement with the protected area. The European Charter Partner will be recognised with a certificate for three years.

In order to maintain recognition as a European Charter Partner the business should demonstrate at the end of the three-year period that it has fulfilled the commitments made, it will then negotiate and sign a new European Charter partnership agreement with the protected area.

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<sup>7</sup> In order to begin working towards a European Charter partnership agreement, these requirements should be met by the tourism business.

<sup>8</sup> How the participation works in practice can vary depending on how the Charter forum is structured in each protected area. Tourism businesses can participate directly on an individual basis or through a representative association.

## 4.7 Validation of the Charter area's methodology

To ensure that there is a commonality in the implementation across Europe, as well as compliance with the principles of Part II of the European Charter, EUROPARC will validate the proposed schemes. This will be done in partnership with the EUROPARC Section and possible with the national or regional Charter networks where appropriate<sup>9</sup>. Once a methodology has been agreed amongst the various partners it is then submitted to the Evaluation Committee for the European Charter. The Evaluation Committee will assess the methodology and approve it for use in that particular area.

The protected area would send EUROPARC the following documentation:

- i. List of the requirements set at protected-area level.
- ii. List of indicative actions, their monitoring indicators and its application methodology for both protected area and tourism business, from which the European Charter partnership agreement will be derived.
- iii. A template of the European Charter partnership agreement setting out the commitments of the protected area and the tourism business (actions and measurable monitoring indicators).
- iv. A European Charter partnership certificate template. See Annex 1.

## 4.8 Signing the European Charter partnership agreement

Once the above requirements have been met the European Charter partnership agreement can be negotiated and signed.

The tourism business then becomes a European Charter Partner and:

- i. is committed to an individual action plan for three years;
- ii. will benefit from the actions promoted by the protected area or other Charter partners;
- iii. will know the general conditions for the use of the brand European Charter (name, logo, etc.);
- iv. is able to get support from the protected area;
- v. is entitled to use the Charter logo together with the protected area or other appropriate logos<sup>10</sup>.

After this period of three years, the business can request renewal of the award, subject to an evaluation by the protected area.

The EUROPARC Federation provides a model partnership agreement for Charter areas.

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<sup>9</sup> EUROPARC encourages the use of methodologies developed and agreed at Section or national network level first. It realises that this may not always be possible, particularly in the early stages of implementation, so is at present happy to receive schemes worked out solely at protected area level. Indeed work already being undertaken in some countries will contribute to others drawing up guidance, which will in turn facilitate harmonisation in approaches and the development of networking activities.

<sup>10</sup> In addition to the general conditions of use defined by EUROPARC for the Charter logo, the other conditions of use of the European Charter Partners corporate image will need to comply with the relevant regional or national regulations.

## Annex 1: EXAMPLE OF PARTNERSHIP CERTIFICATE

(Model certificate can be provided)



EUROPARC  
FEDERATION  
EUROPEAN CHARTER  
FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN  
PROTECTED AREAS

# PARTNERSHIP CERTIFICATE

## OFF THE RAILS

has been accredited a partners of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas and is working in partnership with Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty to contribute to the development of sustainable tourism.

**Forest of Bowland AONB will provide:**

- Access to training events and materials
- Advice and support, including where appropriate access to funding sources, for business development and environmental improvements
- Dedicated Network website
- Visitor information resources
- Feature on website and other publicity

**Off the Rails will:**

- Participate in the Sustainable Tourism Network
- Support Bowland Tourism & Environment Fund
- Maintain Green Tourism Business Scheme
- Maintain relevant quality accreditation

The Charter protected area Forest of Bowland AONB and the Charter Partner Off the Rails agree to Fulfill their commitments as stated in the European Charter Partnership Agreement.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_  
Colin Clifford  
Proprietor  
Settle - 5th March 2008



Off the Rails

Signed \_\_\_\_\_  
Don Mckay  
Principal Officer  
Preston - 5th March 2008



FOREST OF  
BOWLAND  
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Valid from XX XX XX until XX XX XX



## 5 Charter Part III: for companies organising tours

**Travel companies are increasingly offering “discovery tours” to and within protected areas. This confirms their willingness to promote new forms of travel and the discovery of natural environments, and plant and animal life.**

These tours, which are voluntarily limited to groups of 12 to 15, encourage contact with people living in the places visited. They have been devised by those who love nature, who want to help others discover it, and to pass on their knowledge of the world of protected areas.

In subscribing to this Charter, the travel-company managers undertake to adopt a new tourism ethic, which will contribute to the development of sustainable tourism in the areas which they cover. This is aimed at increasing satisfaction for customers who are increasingly concerned about the environment and heritage, and reducing the impact of their activities.

Procedures are to be developed for ratification of the travel company’s commitment to the Charter. They will be based on the undertakings set out below.

### 5.1 Benefits for travel companies

The Charter allows the travel company to:

- be recognised at European level;
- develop new business opportunities, by:
  - targeting customers who are environmentally aware,
  - offering a product which meets the expectations of new European customers,
  - forming partnerships with travel companies in other European countries creating off-season tourism;
- strengthen the quality of its product by:
  - providing a better reception for their customers in the protected area,
  - involvement of local people during the visit,
  - support from the protected area during the development of the holiday including help in selecting sites, availability of staff of the protected area, help in identifying local personalities to meet during visits, etc.;
- increase visitor satisfaction by:
  - demonstrating commitment to the development of sustainable tourism in protected areas,
  - participation in small groups accompanied by qualified guides.

### 5.2 Undertaking by the travel company

1. **To accept and respect the principles of sustainable development incorporated in this Charter whilst adapting them to its own activity**
2. **To define a strategy (1 year) in close partnership with the protected-area authority**

This strategy will put its commitment to the Charter area into practice, with regard to:

- respect for the environment,
- support for local economic and social development,
- preserving quality of life,
- customer satisfaction.

The strategy will define the principle objectives to be achieved by the company.

To contribute to the development of sustainable tourism in the area, the company will strengthen its links with local service-providers (hoteliers, local travel agencies, restaurateurs, craftsmen, and local personalities who can contribute during the visits).

The company will become involved, wherever possible, in the life of the region visited by taking part in meetings organised by the protected area and by contributing new ideas for implementing and monitoring its sustainable tourism development strategy.

### **3. To present this strategy in the form of an action plan**

This action plan will specify actions which have been or will be taken to achieve the objectives set by the strategy. It will define the company's commitment to the following **key issues**:

#### **i. Protection and enhancement of natural and cultural heritage**

- **Respect for capacity limits:** The activities proposed by the company will be compatible with the conservation objectives of the protected area. With this in mind, it will ensure that they have minimum impact on the environment. It will take account of policies and recommendations specific to the protected area and will seek advice from the area's staff when developing new activities.
- **Enhancement of local heritage:** The company will, wherever possible, help to enhance natural, cultural and historical heritage. This means, in particular, that its activities will be based on discovering and understanding this heritage.
- **Conservation of natural resources:** The company will give preference to local service providers which demonstrate commitment to the environment. These will have in place a programme of environmental management covering water management, energy efficiency and land use, as well as waste reduction. The company will seek to reduce the impact of its own activities on the natural resources.
- **Contribution to heritage conservation:** The company will assist the protected area in its mission of protecting and monitoring the natural surroundings, by notifying any changes observed by its customers or tour guides. It will introduce a return-on-capital programme, including a percentage of its tour prices to be donated towards conservation and heritage preservation, and it will notify its customers of this.

#### **ii. Improving the quality of the tourism experience**

In order to meet the expectations of European customers, the travel company will assist the protected area in its quality procedure, by means of advice and recommendations. It will apply the same quality assurance procedure to its own product.

- **Market research:** To improve customer satisfaction, the company will keep the protected-area authority informed of the expectations and needs of its customers. This will allow the area visited to adapt according to demand.
- **Quality procedure:** The tourism product will be based on a total-quality approach, covering reception, services provided, equipment and facilities, marketing and promotion, and of course after-sales service. Careful selection of the local service providers will help the company to reach this objective.

- **Identifying new customers:** The company will identify new customers who are sensitive to the quality of the environment. It will pay particular attention to certain types of visitors who are often ignored in tourism promotions, such as disabled, ill, or convalescing people, young people and low-income groups. The company will avoid any form of elitism in the selection of its customers.

### iii. Raising public awareness

- **Education and interpretation:** All the company's tours and stays in the protected area will be aimed at raising awareness and educating visitors about the environment. They will seek to enhance customers' respect for nature and their understanding of the environments visited.
- **Visitor information:** Wherever possible, the company will arrange meetings in preparation for the visit, and will also provide complete information about the protected area with the travel documents. This is to make visitors aware of the natural and cultural heritage and traditions of the region which they will be able to see during the tour. Throughout the tour, visitors will be provided with additional high-quality information by the tour guides and other participants. Visitors will also be given advice, in particular with regard to purchasing souvenirs. They will be told how to respect local flora and fauna and the general life of the region throughout the visit. Customers will also be informed about the objectives of heritage conservation and sustainable development.
- **Appropriate marketing and promotion:** The marketing and promotion activities of the company will help visitors understand the true value of the protected area. Care should be taken in describing the wildlife which may be seen – never guarantee the sighting of a particular species but rather encourage the discovery of its habitat.  
All promotional material should emphasise the fragile nature of the areas visited. Any brochures and other sales material produced by the company could contain advice to future visitors to the protected areas.  
Finally, the fact that the company is a signatory to this Charter should only be mentioned on products which are the subject of a contract with the protected area and the European evaluation committee.

### iv. Development of tourism specific to the area

The travel package developed by the company will especially encourage the discovery and appreciation of the local cultural and natural heritage, increased environmental awareness and an understanding of the role of the protected area.

To achieve these objectives, the company will arrange for nature guides to be present during the tours. These guides will present the environment using a systematic approach, explaining details about the eco-system and the various habitats. These guides should have a good understanding of the region and the individual sites visited.

### v. Training

Training is an essential tool in putting the company's commitment into action. All employees, including sales staff, contractors, tour guides, etc., should be made aware of the concept of sustainable development. This will complement their existing knowledge about the natural and cultural heritage of the region being visited, and will contribute to better information and satisfaction for visitors.

### vi. Protection and support of the quality of life of the inhabitants of the protected area

To guarantee friendly relations between visitors and local residents, the company will at all times seek to preserve, and even to improve, the quality of life for the latter. Priority will therefore be given to respecting the life of the community and local customs.

To this end, the company will organise each visit with a limited number of participants (between 12 and 15 people). It will give appropriate advice to visitors on avoiding behaviour which might offend the local inhabitants. This will especially be the responsibility of the tour guides.

Finally, the company will become involved in local life by helping to promote cultural events organised by the people living in the protected area.

#### **vii. Social and economic development**

- **Support for the local economy:** To support the local economy, the company will encourage development of tourism based on local initiatives, by taking full advantage of local services in its tours, using local guides, accommodation, restaurants and shops wherever possible.
- **Development of new employment opportunities:** Wherever possible, the company will encourage social integration by offering employment to local people with special needs and to young people, and providing equal opportunities for women and men.

#### **viii. Control of tourist numbers**

- **Monitoring visitor flows:** The company will contribute to monitoring of visitor flows by providing the protected area with regular information on its itineraries and the time and duration of its visits.
- **Channelling of visitor flows:** The company will commit itself to directing its customers towards the less sensitive parts of the area. It will also encourage discovery of the protected area at times when it is less busy, in line with the promotional efforts of the protected area.
- **Traffic control:** Travel to and within the protected area should, wherever possible, be by means of public transport, walking or cycling. The company will therefore provide its customers with information on getting to the sites by public transport. It will also endeavour to arrange assembly points at stations or public transport termini.

Moreover, all motorised vehicles used for leisure purposes (e.g. 4 x 4 vehicles, etc.) will be excluded from all tourist facilities.

#### **ix. Management and integration of visitor facilities**

To support the area's efforts to enhance local architecture, the company will favour accommodation facilities which are typical of the region and which have been well integrated into their surroundings.





# Appendix 1 Charter principles

**These principles are based on the official Charter text. As part of your application you will need to ensure your protected area formally commits to them. A copy for signature is included in your application report.**

The underlying aims of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas are to

- ▶ Increase awareness of, and support for, Europe's protected areas as a fundamental part of our heritage, that should be preserved for, and enjoyed by, current and future generations.
- ▶ Improve the sustainable development and management of tourism in protected areas, which takes account of the needs of the environment, local residents, local businesses and visitors.

The charter principles involve working in partnership, preparing and implementing a strategy, and addressing key issues. Charter protected areas make a series of commitments to achieve the underlying aims:

## **1 To involve all those implicated by tourism in and around the protected area in its development and management.**

A permanent forum, or equivalent arrangement, should be established between the protected area authority, local municipalities, conservation and community organisations and representatives of the tourism industry. Links with regional and national bodies should be developed and maintained.

## **2 To prepare and implement a sustainable tourism strategy and action plan for the protected area.**

The strategy should be based on careful consultation and be approved and understood by local stakeholders. It should contain:

- A definition of the area to be influenced by the strategy, which may extend outside the protected area
- An assessment of the area's natural, historic and cultural heritage, tourism infrastructure, and economic and social circumstances; considering issues of capacity, need and potential opportunity
- An assessment of current visitors and potential future markets
- A set of strategic objectives for the development and management of tourism, covering
  - conservation and enhancement of the environment and heritage
  - economic and social development
  - preservation and improvement of the quality of life of local residents
  - visitor management and enhancement of the quality of tourism offered
- An action plan to meet these objectives
- An indication of resources and partners to implement the strategy
- Proposals for monitoring results

- 3 To protect and enhance the area's natural and cultural heritage, for and through tourism, and to protect it from excessive tourism development by:**
  - monitoring impact on flora and fauna and controlling tourism in sensitive locations
  - encouraging activities, including tourism uses, which support the maintenance of historic heritage, culture and traditions
  - controlling and reducing activities, including tourism impacts, which: adversely affect the quality of landscapes, air and water; use non-renewable energy; and create unnecessary waste and noise
  - encouraging visitors and the tourism industry to contribute to conservation
- 4 To provide all visitors with a high-quality experience in all aspects of their visit, by:**
  - researching the expectations and satisfaction of existing and potential visitors
  - meeting the special needs of disadvantaged visitors
  - supporting initiatives to check and improve the quality of facilities and services
- 5 To communicate effectively to visitors about the special qualities of the area, by:**
  - ensuring that the promotion of the area is based on authentic images, and is sensitive to needs and capacity at different times and in different locations
  - providing readily available and good quality visitor information in and around the area, and assisting tourism enterprises to do so
  - providing educational facilities and services that interpret the area's environment and heritage to visitors and local people, including groups and schools
- 6 To encourage specific tourism products which enable discovery and understanding of the area, by:**
  - providing and supporting activities, events and packages involving the interpretation of nature and heritage
- 7 To increase knowledge of the protected area and sustainability issues amongst all those involved in tourism, by:**
  - providing or supporting training programmes for staff of the protected area, other organisations and tourism enterprises, based on assessing training needs
- 8 To ensure that tourism supports and does not reduce the quality of life of local residents, by:**
  - involving local communities in the planning of tourism in the area
  - ensuring good communication between the protected area, local people and visitors
  - identifying and seeking to reduce any conflicts that may arise
- 9 To increase benefits from tourism to the local economy, by:**
  - promoting the purchase of local products (food, crafts, local services) by visitors and local tourism businesses
  - encouraging the employment of local people in tourism
- 10 To monitor and influence visitor flows to reduce negative impacts, by:**
  - keeping a record of visitor numbers over time and space, including feedback from local tourism enterprises
  - creating and implementing a visitor management plan
  - promoting use of public transport, cycling and walking as an alternative to private cars
  - controlling the siting and style of any new tourism development

