

European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas

The journey continues:
a guide to re-evaluation



EUROPARC
FEDERATION



**EUROPEAN CHARTER
FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN
PROTECTED AREAS**

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The journey continues: a guide to re-evaluation follows on from *How to join the journey: a guide for protected areas* and its associated application report, which form guidance on how to apply to become a member of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism.

The journey continues: a guide to re-evaluation, with *The Charter* and the associated re-evaluation report, shows protected areas already awarded the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism how to retain charter status for a further five years, and assess and develop their practice.

For further details on the Charter see also www.european-charter.org

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Impressum

Official text of the Charter first published by the Fédération des Parcs naturels régionaux de France, 1999; revised and updated by the EUROPARC Federation 2007, 2010.

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

Award of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism represents a huge achievement by a protected area, but in many ways it is only the beginning. The charter is a process, and this manual maps a route towards developing sustainable tourism beyond the initial five-year period.

Process is an important word here. Above all, the Charter exists to help protected areas to develop and manage sustainable tourism. To do this it encourages the use of comprehensive and sustainable structures, objectives and actions. It does not seek to measure the absolute qualities of the areas in terms of landscape and facilities, but rather to facilitate development and growth in partnership.

Like the rest of the charter, re-evaluation is a practical tool, developed by protected areas for protected areas. It monitors progress made in implementing the original tourism strategy and action plan, and assesses plans for future action. The re-evaluation report is modelled on the original application. It reviews the past five years and look at plans for the next five-year period.

Finding the way to sustainable use of an area may be challenging, but protected areas are discovering that becoming a Charter protected area is a motor for achievement in management and development for both the protected area and the region concerned.

Re-evaluation is likewise a valuable process. Protected areas can use the expert verifier's visit to discuss their experience and any problems encountered, and gain an outside perspective and advice for their work in the future. Re-evaluation is a consultative process between the protected area and the verifier, from which the protected area gains. In order to make the most of this opportunity, re-applicants are encouraged to be open about how things have developed, the situation they started from, and where they – and their partners - are heading in the future.

By 2010 76 protected areas had gained Charter status, in nine countries: Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom; all benefited from the strengthened relationships and higher profile of the Charter. Many of them will choose to take the process onwards, learning and helping each other in an expanding and strengthening network.

This manual details the rigorous process involved in onward progression, which involves completion of the separate electronic Charter re-evaluation report. If you have any further questions on the European Charter or the registration, application and verification process, please contact the EUROPARC Federation office (address inside front cover).



2 Key principles

The Charter is designed for protected areas to enter whatever the extent of tourism or tourism structures in the area, and whatever the level of its previous involvement in tourism issues. The emphasis is on starting a process to steer sustainable tourism development in and around the protected area in a pro-active way, and to work towards excellence in this field.

After five years, at re-evaluation, it looks to test progress made on that road to excellence, and at plans for taking things forward in the coming five years. Also assessed will be how the protected area and its partners have progressed Charter aims (as specified in the Charter principles, below), examples of excellence or best practice achieved, how local partnerships have developed, and how the specific recommendations made to the protected area by the verifier and Evaluation Committee after the first evaluation have been addressed.

Charter principles

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





3 Process

Process in brief

The basis of re-evaluation is the report and supporting documentation provided by the protected area. The supporting documentation includes the new action plan which the protected area and its partners are required to develop for the next five years. This should be drawn up in a level of detail similar to that of the first action plan, reporting on all elements of the original, building on it and addressing the main themes of the Charter. It should set up a new scheme of actions for the coming five years, and indicate responsibilities for implementation and budgets allocated or required.

Assuming the documentation submitted is complete and a desk review shows that it appears sufficient, an on-site visit will be arranged by one of the official Charter verifiers, of similar length to the first visit (around two days). Nevertheless, the focus of this visit will be different, seeking to take more of a consultative approach with the protected-area administration and key partners to review progress and future direction, rather than visiting a lot of sites in the area.

The EUROPARC Evaluation Committee will review the re-evaluation reports from its verifiers for each protected area, and take a final decision about re-award of the Charter certificate in each case. The decision will be communicated to each protected area, with reasons and/or recommendations for future work.

The Charter is always awarded for a five-year period. A sample time schedule for a protected area awarded the Charter in 2005 with re-evaluation deadline in 2010 would look as follows:

There must not be a gap between the end of one five-year Charter period and the start of the next. The strategy and action plan – and Charter status – must always follow consecutively, without a period not covered by the Charter.

Sample year	Action
2005 – 2010	Monitor actions in strategy and action plan annually.
2008	Start looking at possible revision of strategy and action plan. Make sure that a budget item is planned for a re-evaluation in 2010.
Early 2009	Contact the EUROPARC Federation and let them know that you would like the necessary documentation. Make sure you are still a member of the EUROPARC Federation. Check that all actions will be completed before the end of the Charter period in September 2010.
End 2009	Submit re-evaluation documentation by deadline (15 December).
2010	Prepare for re-evaluation visit by verifier and for payment in two stages.
September 2010	Presentation of new award at EUROPARC Conference if decision by Evaluation Committee has been positive.

Gaining – and keeping – Charter status is a process of self-questioning, assessment, partnership building and information sharing. It is detailed here, in an easy-to-follow list with actions marked in each section. The application itself takes the form of documentation of the following process.

1 Agree to the Charter principles

Holders of the European Charter must agree to abide by a set of principles for sustainable tourism in protected areas, based on the full Charter text, and reprinted above as section 2. There is a copy of these principles with your Charter re-evaluation report for printing out and signing. They present the undertaking of the authority responsible for the protected area in summarised and simplified form.

Action Sign and date the principles to signify your renewed acceptance of them, and return with your application for re-evaluation.

2 Fulfil the Charter criteria

Protected-area authorities making their original application for the Charter certificate set out from very different levels of tourism development and activity. Whatever level they started out from, after five years – at re-evaluation – the verifiers and Evaluation Committee will be looking to test their progress on the road towards excellence in sustainable tourism development. There are some **basic thresholds which apply to all Charter protected areas at re-evaluation** and are essential for re-award of the certificate. The verifiers and Evaluation Committee will be looking for:

- Continued existence and further development of your working, **permanent forum** or similar **partnership structure** for sustainable tourism development in the area; documentation of its work (e.g. minutes, decisions) and evidence that it involves **all relevant stakeholders**.
- Good or strengthened **cooperation with local businesses**.
- **Clear progress on implementing the action plan** you presented at original application.
- A live and working **strategy and action plan for the next five years** which are publicly available; an action plan which identifies the relevant stakeholders for each action; a budget for the action plan and staffing which correlate to the level of action foreseen.
- Evidence that the protected area and its partners have taken, and will continue to take, **action** to address each of the **key issues** specified in the Charter principles 3-10, to progress or maintain high standards in these fields.
- **Action** taken to address the **specific recommendations** made by the verifier and Evaluation Committee as a result of verification 5 years ago.

Action Proceed with your application with these key criteria in mind.

3 Complete the re-evaluation report

The re-evaluation report is a key document, and will be used as the main reference point for assessing your application for re-evaluation. It serves as a summary of your activities for both the verifier and Evaluation Committee. Furthermore, it represents an important record of your work as a Charter protected area. The report serves as a type of “self-assessment”, enabling you to identify strengths and weaknesses in your work over the past five years, and communicate these effectively to the verifier.

The re-evaluation questionnaire should be submitted in original format, and all questions must be answered. The most essential points, which are critical for successful re-evaluation (see “basic thresholds” under Point 2 above), are **marked with yellow shading**. Although the document may seem long, by asking you these questions now we can be sure that no aspect of the Charter is overlooked. The verifier is able to concentrate on key aspects which emerge from your answers during his/her visit, rather than having to ask you these detailed questions then. The task of re-evaluation is in fact larger than the original verification, as we are now looking at both your work over the past five years and plans for the future.

The re-evaluation questionnaire should be submitted in **English, French, German or Spanish** (see also information on language in section 4 below).

For each question in the re-evaluation report, you should provide a short summary response. It is important that these responses can be clearly understood on their own. You may also cross-reference to the place where further evidence or information can be found. Yes/No answers should be supplemented in each case with a short elaboration.

The evidence required for some questions is likely to be contained in your revised / new sustainable tourism strategy and action plan for the next five years, and we anticipate that the re-evaluation report will make cross-references to these documents, stating the relevant page and paragraph numbers. This is particularly the case in the questionnaire sections relating to Charter principles 3-10, under "Planned activities in new action plan". Similar cross-references may be made to other documents. However, it is important that the report itself provides an overview of how you are fulfilling Charter requirements, and is not just a collection of cross-references.

Action *Complete, sign and date the re-evaluation report. Submit as a hard copy and in electronic format on the form provided.*

4 Prepare strategy and action plan for sustainable tourism

A new Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism for the next five years should be prepared, and your Strategy revised or updated for the next five years as necessary.

The basis of this is a complete report on the previous action plan, containing all the information about each action, how the indicators have worked, budget, self-evaluation and reasons for any actions scheduled and not implemented.

This work should have been undertaken in accordance with Charter principle 2. They should be presented as separate, self-contained document / documents, i.e. not included within wider documents such as protected area management plans. This is important for increasing the sense of "ownership" of the strategy and action plan amongst the protected area's partners, particularly as they are implicated in implementation.

Ideally, the strategy and action plan should be presented in English, French, German or Spanish. If this is not possible, they may also be presented in your country's language, provided that your re-evaluation report (see above) gives good summary responses to each question and clear cross-references to the precise location of details in the strategy and action plan. EUROPARC will try to provide a verifier who speaks your language; however this will not always be possible.

Action *Submit a copy of your strategy and action plan for the next five years as part of your application for re-evaluation.*

5 Prepare strategy and action plan for sustainable tourism

We ask you to submit a number of additional supporting documents:

- A map (1/100 000 scale if possible) showing: the boundary of the protected area; any other relevant strategic zoning; indications of any tourism policies and actions that can be shown spatially/ graphically.
- The overall protected area management plan (if this has been revised or newly prepared in the past five years).
- A small selection of current visitor/tourism communication documents relating to the protected area which are of relevance for your protected area's re-evaluation (maximum of five key documents).

- A list of other available documentation on the protected area which can be viewed on site (including, for example, documented results of the monitoring of your action plan, recent background analyses and studies, tourist information and leaflets, other relevant literature etc.).

Do not send additional background studies, analyses or scientific assessments with your application. Any such work undertaken as preparation for your new action plan may be viewed by the verifier on site, if necessary.

Action *Submit the documents above with your application for re-evaluation.*

6 Dispatch the application

You need to prepare three sets of the re-evaluation documents as follows (hard copy and electronic version):

- ☐ Charter principles, signed and dated.
- ☐ Re-evaluation questionnaire completed and signed.
- ☐ Strategy and Action Plan for the next five years including report of every element of previous action plan.
- ☐ Map (1/100 000 scale if possible) showing: the boundary of the protected area; any other relevant strategic zoning; indications of any tourism policies and actions that can be shown spatially/ graphically.
- ☐ Overall protected area management plan (if this has been revised or newly prepared in the past five years).
- ☐ Small selection of current visitor/tourism communication documents relating to the protected area (maximum of five key documents).
- ☐ List of other available documentation on the protected area which can be viewed on site (e.g. documented results of the monitoring of your action plan, recent background analyses and studies, tourist information and leaflets, other relevant literature).

One set is for you to retain, one to send to EUROPARC Consulting, and one to be sent to the verifier, once she or he has been appointed. Ensure that all sets of application documents are complete, and that the principles and application reports are signed.

To begin the re-evaluation process, please send your completed application (one set of documents) to EUROPARC Consulting (address below). Check the date of the current deadline with info@europarc-consulting.org or info@european-charter.org.

On receiving your application, EUROPARC Consulting will check it for completeness and appoint an expert in sustainable tourism in protected areas as the verifier for your protected area. You will be notified of his/her address and requested to send the second set of application documents directly to the expert.

Send first set of application documents to:

Wilf Fenten
EUROPARC Consulting GmbH
The Shaws
Selside
Settle
North Yorkshire BD24 0HZ
England

Action *Prepare three complete sets of the re-evaluation documents. Send one to EUROPARC Consulting GmbH; keep one for dispatch directly to the expert verifier appointed for your protected area, and keep one for your own records.*

7 Pay application fee

Administering the Charter - including analysing the application, planning and undertaking the verification visit, and making the final evaluation - carries a cost. It is therefore necessary for protected areas undergoing re-evaluation to pay a fee to cover these costs if the process is to be viable.

The standard fee per protected area for re-evaluation is EUR 5000 + VAT¹. You will also be required to pay the travel expenses and local costs (accommodation, board and local travel) for the verifier's visit to your protected area (these are not included in the fee).

The fee will be paid to EUROPARC Consulting GmbH, which will administer the re-evaluation process on behalf of the EUROPARC Federation. Upon receipt of your full application, EUROPARC Consulting will send you a contract for the verification in your protected area. This is to be signed and returned, and 50% of the verification fee (EUR 2500 + VAT) transferred to EUROPARC Consulting's bank account prior to the start of the verification visit. The final instalment (EUR 2500 + VAT) plus travel expenses are to be paid upon completion of the verification.

Action *Make budget for the process and pay application fee.*

8 Plan verification visit and report

The expert verifier appointed by EUROPARC will check the re-evaluation documents, visit your protected area and make an assessment report. The verification visit will usually take around two days.

The verifier will conduct interviews with personnel of the protected area responsible for tourism. Arrangements should also be made for him/her to meet a selection of other stakeholders involved in tourism in the area, including representatives of tourism enterprises. You are encouraged to take advantage of the verifier's visit to discuss your experience and any problems faced, and to gain an outside perspective and advice for your work in the future.

The verifier will be asked to pay particular attention to how work has developed over the past five years, on-going relations with stakeholders, how the protected area and its partners are progressing Charter aims as specified in the Charter principles, how the recommendations made after original verification have been addressed, the balance and consistency of your future plans and the resources you are applying to achieve action proposed.

The dates, timing and programme for the visit will be agreed with you in advance.

The verifier will submit a re-evaluation report to the Evaluation Committee in a standardised format. You will receive a copy of this report for your information, to show the strengths and weaknesses which the verifier has identified and possible opportunities for improvement.

Action *Plan verification visit.*

Get feedback

- 9 An evaluation committee of experienced experts in protected areas and sustainable tourism has been appointed by the EUROPARC Federation. It will consider your full application for re-evaluation together with the verifier's report. It will meet in June (applicants will be notified of the date nearer the time).

¹ VAT in Germany is charged at 19%. In some cases where the evaluation is carried out in another country, it is possible that VAT will be payable in that country and at the relevant national rate. This must be clarified for your individual case following submission of your Charter application and prior to implementation of the verification visit.

The Committee's decision will be communicated to you. This will be either:

- a) to re-award the Charter;
- b) to defer the award subject to specific changes being made, or
- c) to withdraw the Charter certificate.

In case of (b) and (c), reasons will be given.

In the case of (b), you will be asked to provide evidence that sufficient steps have been taken to rectify the problems identified, by a time to be agreed with you.

Action *Receive and share decision; plan any identified changes needed.*

10 Remain a "chartered" protected area

Protected areas that are re-awarded the Charter will be identified publicly. They will be allowed to continue using the Charter logo and encouraged to promote the principles and obtain as much media coverage of their success as possible.

The Charter certificate is awarded for five years. At the end of this period you will again be invited to submit an application for re-evaluation to EUROPARC.

Action *Receive Charter; celebrate status; plan future membership.*

11 Participate in and benefit from the network

In re-signing the Charter certificate, protected areas commit themselves to implementing their strategy and action plan together with their partners over the coming five years. At the same time, it is expected that the Charter protected areas will continue to participate in the Charter network. Contributions by all Charter areas to networking activities – contributing their own experience, sharing ideas or problems, attending networking meetings, etc. – are essential to make the network a live one, and to bring real "added value" for all Charter areas. At the same time, the network is a basic tool for EUROPARC and Charter areas to maintain contact during the five years following the award. The commitment to participate in the Charter network will be included on the Charter certificate signed by all Charter areas.





4 Costs and conditions

The process of running and co-ordinating the Charter carries considerable costs, to which participating protected areas contribute. The costs for participating protected areas are summarised as follows:

Protected area Charter candidate

- Registration fee (for registration as a candidate protected area): **€500**
- Verification fee (for administration of the application and verification process): **€5000 + VAT** (as applicable)

In addition, the protected-area authority is required to cover the costs of **travel, accommodation and board** for the visiting verifier and reimburse him/her direct.

Confirmed Charter areas (following successful verification)

- Mid-term monitoring/evaluation visit (after 2 ½ years) – optional, upon request by the protected area, fees subject to extent of work required.
- Re-evaluation, i.e. evaluation for renewal of Charter membership (after 5 years): **€5000 + VAT** (as applicable)

In addition, the protected-area authority is required to cover the costs of **travel, accommodation and board** for the visiting verifier and reimburse him/her direct.

Networking

A networking fee will only be due when the network is fully activated.

Networking fee (minimum contribution towards on-going co-ordination and facilitation of the Charter areas' network): **€500 per year**

All Charter areas are required to be members of the EUROPARC Federation. Protected areas which are not already EUROPARC members will be requested to join the Federation upon registering as candidate protected areas.

