

Introduction



Workshop, September 2007, Hainich National Park

Quality management in protected areas is currently a topic of intense national and international debate among nature conservationists. Why is the development of a quality management strategy – which is a tried and tested instrument to increase efficiency in the business world – relevant for the National Nature Landscapes¹ and in particular for the German national parks?

National parks are of considerable global importance for the conservation of the national and international nature heritage. They represent an internationally acknowledged form of protected area and are listed as an independent category by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). German national parks differ in terms of their development history, size, and starting conditions. The administrations of the national parks are subordinate to the individual German laender, which explains some of the differences relating to the financial frameworks and the staffing arrangements.

National parks find themselves having to cope with increasingly complex tasks – from nature conservation, through research, to education and regional development. Therefore it is important for them to work efficiently and to constantly improve management methods.

¹ “Nationale Naturlandschaften”: the new brand for national parks, biosphere reserves and nature parks in Germany

The Research + Development project “Development of Quality Criteria and Standards for German National Parks” (October 2005 – February 2008) created the basic requirements for the introduction of a quality management system.

The remit of this project supported financially by BMU/BfN² and carried out with the approval of LANA³ was to develop a method of evaluation which would take into account both the national and international specifications and the specific framework conditions for German national parks, with the goal of improving the process of quality maintenance and promotion by means of effective management. The method should be broadly supported and applied over a wide area. As a result, numerous actors were involved right from the start in the development of appropriate criteria and standards as well as suitable methods and indicators for their inspection.

In this publication, we present the methods used for this project, which lasted nearly 2 1/2 years, and the resultant coordinated quality set of fields of action, criteria and standards as well as tested evaluation sheets.

² German Federal Ministry of the Environment, Nature Conservation and Reactor Safety / Federal Agency of Nature Conservation

³ German Inter-State Working Group for Nature Conservation, Landscape Management and Recreation

Background and objectives

A series of international and national agreements and laws are relevant for nature conservation and species protection which impact directly or indirectly on the goals and remit of the German national parks. The amended Federal Nature Conservation Act⁴ dated 4 April 2002, provides the following definition in Section 24:

- (1) National parks are areas designated on a legally binding basis as areas to be protected on a uniform basis that meet the following criteria:
1. The area is large with characteristic features;
 2. The criteria defined for nature conservation areas are met in the greater part of the area, and
 3. The greater part of the area concerned is in a status characterized by little or no human impact; or is suitable for developing / being developed into a state which safeguards largely undisturbed natural processes in their natural dynamics.
- (2) The aim of national parks is to safeguard, in the greater part of their area, largely undisturbed natural processes in their natural dynamics. Within the scope of the protection purpose, national parks should also serve the purposes of scientific environmental observation, education in natural history, as well as enabling the public to experience nature.
- (3) The laender shall ensure that national parks receive the same level of protection as that afforded to nature conservation areas, taking into account their particular protection purpose and allowing for exemptions required in view of the size of the area and its human settlements.

In the following, we briefly present some of the international, EU and regionally-binding agreements which the Federal Republic of Germany has entered into since 1975 and which are relevant for this project. These include nationally accepted recommendations under international law as well as legally binding standards, some with the character of laws. The directives of the European Union (EU) are transposed into national law by member states.

1. The “Convention on Biological Diversity” (CBD) is the central international instrument for the protection of biological diversity. Article 8 of the convention contains the recommendation to set up a system of protected areas or such areas in which measures are implemented for the conservation of biological

diversity. The CBD is an internationally legally binding instrument. At the 7th Conference of Parties to the CBD in 2004 (COP 7), a “Programme of work on protected areas” was adopted. The objective of this programme of work is to achieve and maintain efficiently managed, ecologically representative national and international systems of protected areas, and to integrate these in a global network. With an effective protected area management system, the German national parks are making a significant contribution towards fulfilling this international convention.

2. The international Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, better known as the World Heritage Convention (WHC) was adopted by UNESCO in 1972. Inscribed areas for which the legal requirements are not being met are included on the “List of World Heritage in Danger”. If the situation worsens further, the world heritage status can be withdrawn. Preparations are currently underway to inscribe the Wadden Sea (mud flats on the North Sea coast) and five beech wood areas as world natural heritage – all in national parks and a biosphere reserve.
3. Many German national parks are subject to the European Union’s Birds Directive from 1979, and the Directive on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (FFH Directive 92/43/EWG) which came into force in 1992. In some national parks there are regional agreements in accordance with the “Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals” (known as the “Bonn Convention”) and also, at least in terms of moral obligations, the “Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat” formulated in 1971 (known as the “Ramsar Convention on Wetlands”).

In addition to these obligations, which are important for the management of national parks, there are also specific recommendations of the IUCN, founded in 1948 as the world’s first global environmental organisation. With the support of its scientific branch, the “World Commission on Protected Areas” (WCPA) it organises the World Parks Congress, which takes place every ten years.

Milestones were laid for protected areas internationally with the 5th World Parks Congress of IUCN in Durban (2003) and the “Programme of Work on Protected areas” of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD VII/28) in 2004 in Kuala Lumpur, as well as Resolution 3.047 “Durban Action Plan-CBD programme of work on protected areas” and the Resolution 3.048 “IUCN Guidelines for protected area management categories” at the World Conservation Congress in November 2004 in Bangkok. These have already affected and continue to influence German nature conservation policy.

⁴ www.naturschutzrecht.net/Gesetze/Bund/English/f-bnatschg_en.htm
((translation amended))



Regional conference, January 2007, Bavarian Forest National Park



Advisory board meeting, June 2007, Frankfurt Zoological Society

Regarding national parks, this means developing an evaluation system which takes account of both international standards and also the national situation and requirements. For example, the 14 German national parks are relatively young. Nevertheless they meanwhile constitute a representative selection of the key major landscapes in Germany. Bearing in mind the predominance of the cultural landscape and the few remaining “natural” areas, the consequence is that the national parks not only vary in type but are also very different in size, ranging from 3003 hectares for the Jasmund National Park to the 441,500 ha of the Schleswig-Holstein Wadden Sea national park. It is also necessary to consider the various legal provisions, because the Federal Nature Conservation Act has so far only provided a national framework and the *laender*, which have the responsibility for nature conservation, have made various legislative provisions for national parks within the federal framework. However, there are not only differences in terms of their nature and the legislative framework. Other key areas of distinctions include the ownership, organisational structure, and the staffing and funding provisions. For this reason, a “status-quo analysis”

was carried out as part of the project which provided data from 2006 for comparison purposes. The information gained in this way established a basis from which standards for German national parks were developed.

The results of this analysis were on the whole sobering, which only confirmed the urgent need for action to improve the quality of the national parks. In addition to quality assurance, the project had also set itself the goal of achieving a long-term improvement of quality through the examination of management effectiveness. This involved a two-year process with lengthy discussions and numerous meetings, bringing together actors from a variety of backgrounds in order to ensure the widest possible acceptability and transparency for the project. From the start, participants included representatives from the Federal Environment Ministry, the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, LANA, individual *laender* environment ministries, NGOs such as WWF and the German brands for ‘Bird Life and Friends of the Earth’ as well as personnel from the individual national park administrations.

Approach

At the start of the project in October 2005 joint agreement was reached on an approach between the initiator and organiser EUROPARC Germany and the expert representative of the national parks' working group.

1. Development of visions as the basis for the formulation of quality goals
2. Survey of the status quo in the 14 national parks
3. Development of fields of action including relevant criteria and standards
4. Formulation of a catalogue of questions with indicators to examine the standards
5. Pre-test of the evaluation sheet in four national parks

An overview of the aspects to be taken into consideration in the development process is provided in the following figure:

The methodological approach within the project consisted of five consecutive phases.

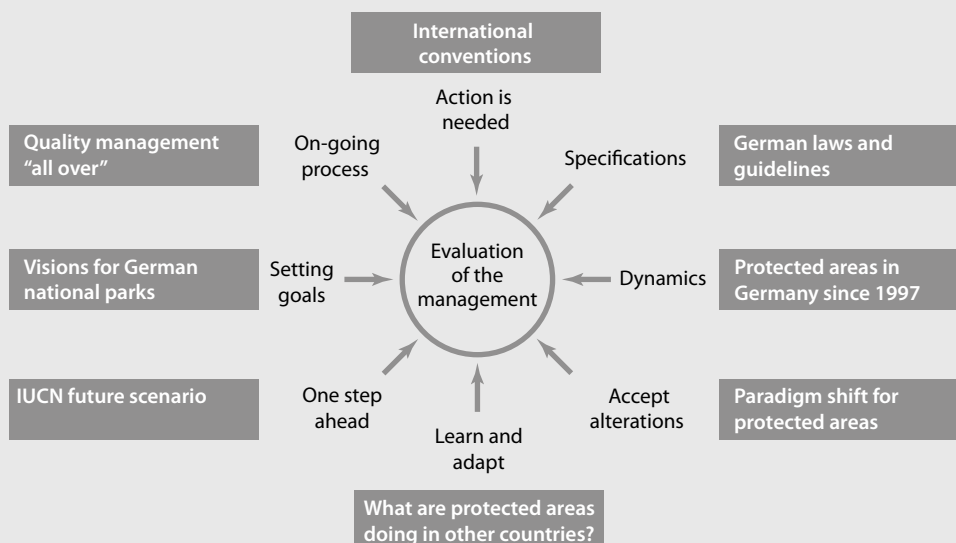
Phase 1: Start-up and presentation of a project approach

The fields of work in this phase include the review of existing evaluation systems for German biosphere reserves and nature parks, the formulation of first visions for national parks, the discussion of (and agreement on) ten fields of action, the selection of a corresponding set of criteria and the preparation of information about the WCPA framework for the evaluation of management effectiveness.

Phase 2: Project processing with intensive participation of various specialist groups

In this phase, standards and criteria were identified and formulations were harmonised. Other fields of work included the preparation of the status-quo analysis in the 14 German national parks in the summer of 2006 and the clarification of the framework conditions for the evaluation of the national parks in Germany.

Evaluation of the management



Phase 3: Development of the assessment procedure

In the main phase of the project, national and international evaluation systems for large protected areas were reviewed and a suitable assessment procedure was developed. In particular, during this phase three regional conferences were organised in order to integrate the personnel of the national park administrations more closely in the project. Furthermore, questions and indicators were collected for the evaluation sheet and a methodology was determined for the assessment procedure.

Phase 4: Examination of the practicability of the assessment procedure

The key aspect of this phase was the test of the evaluation sheet in the national parks Bayerischer Wald, Hamburg Wadden Sea, Hainich, and Mueritz. With each test, the sheet could be further improved and the procedure adapted.

Phase 5: Final discussion with experts and publication of the results

The discussion with experts led to a further adaptation of the evaluation sheet. This was produced as an on-line version which meant that in future it would be much easier to complete and to evaluate.

The overall progress of the project was characterised by a very constructive exchange between the various agents. Participation in each of the phases involved successive meetings of the national parks' working group, workshops, advisory board meetings, and regional conferences. The numerous working sessions made an important contribution to determining the contents and ensuring the acceptability of the process.

The following events were organised:

- 3 large workshops with the participation of all the actor groups,
- 5 meetings of the national parks working group,
- 3 advisory board meetings,
- 3 regional conferences,
- 3 Federal government-Laender consultation meetings,
- 2 consultation rounds with the chair of LANA.

The workshops brought together the directors and personnel of the national park administrations, representatives of BMU/BfN and the laender, IUCN, and nature conservation associations, and 'friends of the park' organisations. An advisory board with experts from various disciplines and LANA-representatives supported the project and was actively involved in the work process.



Second workshop,
November 2006,
Goettingen

The quality set – Vision, fields of action, criteria and standards

The basics for the development of quality goals – how do the national parks want to develop in future? – is the agreement about a shared vision.

“National parks are the pearls of nature internationally and in Germany, in which ‘Nature can be Nature’. They are characterised by unique undisturbed landscapes, wildness, and a natural variety of species. They represent our most important natural heritage, including for future generations.

They let us all experience how it is when people do not change nature. Visitors can have great experience, without disturbing nature.”

In accordance with this, the following medium-term objectives were formulated in accordance with the chosen fields of action, i.e. the topics and the associated duties of the national park administrations.

Criteria were allocated to the fields of action.

The criteria are described by standards. Quality standards in this project are the best possible achievable solution or states, taking national and international provisions into account.

The ten fields of action and the appropriate criteria

Fields of action	Criteria set
Framework conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Legal foundations – Protection purpose – Overriding planning principles – Competences – Ownership rights – Boundaries and shape
Protection of natural biological diversity and dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Space for natural processes – Extent – Level of naturalness – Habitats of international and national significance – Species management – Ecosystem networking
Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Organisational structure – Staff levels – Ranger system – Personnel management – Financing – Advisory boards and curatorship
Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Model for landscape development – Management plan – Zoning – Renaturation – Strategies for sustainable use – Visitor guidance and area control – Integration of the national park in the region – Evaluation of measures

Fields of action	Criteria set
Cooperation and partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Cooperation agreements – Integration in working groups and networks – Volunteer management
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Message – Corporate design (CD) – Communication structure
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Educational strategies – Education courses – Visitor guidance
Experiencing nature and recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Offers for experiencing nature – Infrastructure for visitors
Monitoring and research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Research coordination – Basic research – Monitoring – Documentation
Regional development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Image – Impulses for the region – Sustainable regional development

Quality standards for German National parks

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

Criteria	Standards
	2. Field of action – Protection of natural biological diversity and dynamics
Space for natural processes	Over most of their area, national parks protect the natural dynamics of processes of nature with as little disturbance as possible. In general, this is ensured within a period of not longer than 30 years after an area has been designated a national park and for at least 75% of the national park area. The areas for the protection of natural dynamic processes should be contiguous or uninterrupted, with few outer boundaries. National parks with more than 30% of their area not in public ownership or which in Germany completely enclose a habitat which is of global importance can define a longer transition period in the national park plan or can protect large areas of representative types of habitat in their natural processes over most of its area.
Extent	A national park is extensive, taking into account the ecosystem-related criteria. It represents one or more ecosystems and ensures the process of natural dynamics. A national park must have an area of at least 10,000 hectares. As an exception, a smaller area which is internationally representational can be a national park. The area shall be so enclosed that the protection purpose is achievable within its boundaries.
Level of naturalness	National parks have over the larger part of their area ecosystems which have a high level of naturalness. These ecosystems have the natural species composition and diversity which is typical for the location.
Habitats of international and national significance	The national park contains habitats of international and/or national significance. These are shown in the management plan, which also includes definitions of the measures necessary to secure them that are permissible in terms of the space needed for natural processes.
Species management	Generally, species management is an exceptional situation in national parks. The necessary measures for this are presented in the management plan.
Ecosystem networking	The national park is connected by ecologically effective corridors with the important areas for habitats and species protection in its surroundings.

Criteria	Standards
	3. Field of action – Organisation
Organisational structure of the protected area administration	The national park administration is directly responsible to the highest nature conservation authority. It is an independent, efficient special authority. In particular it has the following duties: Conservation of natural processes, management, supervision of area, maintenance of recreational infrastructure for experiencing nature, contribution to education for sustainable development, monitoring and research, communication, cooperation, cooperation in regional development in the surroundings of the national park and general administration.
Staff levels	The staffing levels ensure capable, on-going work on all the matters listed under "Organisational structure of the national park administration".
Ranger system	Full-time personnel shall be provided by the national park administration, generally on permanent contracts, for the supervision of visitors and the monitoring of the compliance with the protection regulations. For the supervision work, the administration integrates a network of volunteers, honorary personnel and full-time staff of non governmental associations. The number of people needed for visitor guidance and supervision of the compliance with the protection regulations depends on the nature and size of the national park, the numbers of visitors, the tasks involved, and the potential risks and disturbances. The national park administration coordinates a uniform presentation and ensures a uniform level of information. The supervisors are well trained and receive regular further training. They are qualified as a certified nature and landscape carer, or have equivalent training.
Personal management	The personnel management is carried out professionally by the national park administration. The objective is to achieve high levels of motivation and satisfaction of the personnel and high levels of efficiency. Staff work independently, they are involved in decision-making processes, receive regular further training and share in the internal flow of information. The national park administration has a clear voice in the selection of its personnel.
Financing	The full financing of the national park is provided by the federal state in each case. The financing covers at least the protection of natural processes, management, supervision of area, maintenance of recreational infrastructure for experiencing nature, contribution to education for sustainable development, monitoring and research, communication, cooperation in the regional development in the national park surroundings as well as general administration. Support by third parties for the goals of the national parks is desirable.
Advisory boards and curatorships	Advisory boards, boards of trustees and other advisory bodies promote the development of the national park and support the integration of the national parks in the region.

Criteria	Standards
	4. Field of action – Management
Model for landscape development	Every national park has its own model for landscape development. This provides a foundation, is valid over the long term, is visionary, and is compatible with the overriding vision for German national parks von EU-ROPARC Germany (2005). The specific vision for the national park is anchored in the management plan. The vision is directed both inwardly towards the personnel, and also outwardly.
Management plan	The management plan is essential for the work of the national park administration. The goals of the national park are clearly identifiable in this. The plan contains the key fields of action, strategies and the planning for measures in order to achieve the vision and the specific goals. The plan is binding for the authorities. Management planning also specifies time-horizons and indicators to reach the individual goals. An important component of this is the determination of measures to monitor success. The management plan should be formulated not more than five years after the designation of the national park and subsequently updated at least every ten years.
Zoning	Zoning – where necessary – serves to structure the national parks in areas in which process protection has already been realised and areas in which management measures are being carried out temporarily or in the long-term. The process protection zone should be as contiguous and extensive as possible.
Renaturation	Renaturation measures in the national parks are limited to restoration or initial measures solely in those areas in which anthropogenic changes prior to the establishment of the national park have been such that it is not reasonable to expect natural self-regulation even in the long term. Renaturation measures are determined for a limited period in the national park plan. They serve to optimise the ecosystem quality of the national park.
Strategies for sustainable use	National parks are not aimed at the commercial utilisation of resources. Where such usage occurs in the national park it should not contradict the protection purpose and should only take place on a smaller part of the area of the national park. Utilisation which does not satisfy this condition is to be terminated as soon as possible.
Visitor guidance and area control	Visitor guidance takes place on the basis of a zoning strategy which forms part of the management plan. On the basis of the knowledge of nature conservation experts and experience with nature recreation, routes and areas are selected for the visitors and appropriately designated. In the national park, paths are signposted and where necessary no access areas are determined. The ranger service guides, informs and supervises.

Criteria	Standards
	4. Field of action – Management
Integration of the national parks in the region	The national park region is defined. The management plan contains recommendations for the national park region. The national park administration contributes to the planning for surrounding areas.
Evaluation of the measures	The necessity for the measures carried out in the fields of visitor guidance and supervision, educational work, nature conservation, species protection, and renaturation as well as volunteer management is examined at regular intervals and their success evaluated. The results are disseminated. The findings from the evaluation flow into the management process and where appropriate lead to alterations of the strategies and their implementation.

Criteria	Standards
	5. Field of action – Cooperation agreements and partners
Cooperation agreements	The national park administration uses cooperation agreements and partnerships in order to gain the support of as many relevant social groups as possible for the shaping of the national park and its surroundings. The participants in the cooperation agreements and the partners acknowledge the goals of the national park and support them. The basis for the cooperation is the presentation of a strategy document by the national park administration concerning the general handling of the cooperation.
Integration in working groups and networks	The national park is integrated in many ways with its surroundings. It contributes significantly to the image of the region. The national park administration is actively represented in all relevant working groups and networks.
Volunteer management	National parks understand that the cooperation with volunteers is an enrichment of their activities and helps to establish the protected area in the region. It offers opportunities for people of all ages, with various qualifications, abilities and interests. The volunteer management programme includes professional supervision, the integration of volunteers in the team with full-time personnel as well as recognition of volunteers.

Criteria	Standards
	6. Field of action – Communication
Message	The messages of all communication activities promote the unique selling point of the national park and strengthen its product and image position. The messages are targeted towards selected groups, have a depth of content and also reach the emotions.
Corporate design (CD)	The corporate design (CD) and the corporate identity (CI) provide a uniform image, based on the specifications in a CD Manual, with which the protected area administrations can present their national park in all their communications as belonging to the "Nationale Naturlandschaften".
Communication structure	The national park administrations communicate with the relevant target groups at regional and national levels. In addition to regularly collecting up-to-date information, the direct dialogue with the target groups is also very important. This offers the opportunity to inform about the role of the national parks, their specific tasks and special activities and at the same time to invite them to participate in joint activities. A communications structure is institutionalised to provide continuous contacts to partners, superior authorities and regional bodies such as advisory boards and board of trustees, special purpose associations, nature conservation societies and tourism associations.

Criteria	Standards
	7. Field of action – Education
Educational strategies	Existing educational strategies for specific target groups are implemented as part of the work relating to national parks. It is essential that the educational plans are regularly up-dated and that the personnel are provided with further training. Educational courses are coordinated by the national park administration, and periodically evaluated.
Education courses	The educational contributions provide information about the goals and duties of the national park and what can be found in them, with the main focus being placed on the central message of the national park. The national park makes a contribution towards education for sustainable development. In the educational work, the idea of the national park is linked to the global task – the conservation of natural basis of life for this and future generations.
Visitor guidance	For visitor guidance, the operating strategies adopted for the work of rangers, for education, and for other visitor supervision are coordinated with one another. The individuals involved know the approaches of the others who are contributing. The general guidance of visitors takes place in the information centre and at the individual information points. The personnel working there explain the general and specific duties and goals of the national park and transmit identification with the national park.

Criteria	Standards
	8. Field of action – Experiencing nature and recreation
Offers for experiencing nature	Encouraging people to experience nature is one of the most important tasks of a national park. The methods adopted will depend on the characteristics of the park itself. It will include offers for groups, individuals and for seasonal activities. In addition, the national park administration works together with cultural institutions in the region. Where it is appropriate and compatible with the protection purpose it combines cultural and natural experiences.
Infrastructure for visitors	An infrastructure for visitors exists in the national park. This is appropriate for the natural area and the protection purpose and is also attractive and visitor-oriented, while at the same time being in accordance with the principles of sustainable development. The signposting in the park is uniform and easily recognisable.

Criteria	Standards
	9. Field of action – Monitoring and research
Research coordination	Research is directed towards questions which are relevant for national parks. The research strategy of the national park forms a part of the management plan. The national park administration assesses whether research projects proposed by third parties are compatible with the protection purpose, and also coordinates research projects.
Basic research	The national park administration collects information about the features of the park over the whole of its area in the context of the landscape history and the history of its use, and this can provide the basis for the national park plan. The determination of the fundamentals can be carried over into a monitoring process.
Monitoring	Monitoring is carried out in the national park to an adequate extent and in accordance with uniform standards, and is oriented to the goals and the protection purpose of the national park. Among other things it also serves to check progress.
Documentation	The information collected in the general surveys, monitoring and project research is evaluated in accordance with scientific criteria, worked up, documented and shall be made accessible in a suitable form.

Criteria	Standards
	10. Field of action – Regional development
Image	The national park is the most important image factor in its region. Survey are conducted regularly to determine the status of its image among the residents and visitors, as a way of monitoring the success of the park's own communications strategy.
Impulses for the Region	The positive effects of the national park for the region are regularly measured, documented, communicated outwards, and developed further.
Impulses for sustainable regional development	The national park administration provides impulses for sustainable regional development. In particular it contributes to the formulation of a sustainable mobility strategy for the region. The strategy provides the basis for traffic guidance measures and traffic calming as well as for the deployment of environmentally-friendly means of transport in the region in general and in the park itself, in order to make the park accessible and enjoyable. In addition, the national park administration cooperates locally in the development of sustainable tourism.

The evaluation procedure

In order to examine the criteria and standards, an evaluation procedure was developed to compare the existing situation with the goals and projections. This involves a questionnaire with open questions and indicators and an evaluation methodology.

The indicators are based on the WCPA framework of IUCN.

Regarding the evaluation methodology, the participants agreed that every field of action should be equally weighted. Such weighting would divert attention from the important principle of strength-weakness analysis. Because the primary objective is to confront national parks with their current situation in order to be able to formulate an action plan in accordance with the standards which will lead to a desirable situation in future. The principles of voluntary participation and self-assessment remain unimpaired because the national park administrations collect the data for the evaluation themselves with external back-up.

High demands were placed on the evaluation procedure right from the start. It had to be practicable, but also acceptable to international and national experts. The indicators for assessing the criteria and standards should be transparent, logical, and where possible also quantifiable.

A trial evaluation was carried out in four test parks – the National parks Bayerischer Wald, Hamburg Wadden Sea, Hainich and Mueritz – from April 2007 to February 2008. The test showed first of all that the procedure that had been developed worked and was suitable for practical applications. In addition, the reports drawn up on the basis of the responses to the questionnaires provided a helpful overview of the work of the national parks, including strengths and weaknesses. The subsequent discussion about the guidance to action with the project team provided an important final element to the procedure.

WCPA framework for evaluating management effectiveness

source: Hockings et al. (2006)



Prospects

The evaluation set in train a discussion process among the personnel about the goals and the duties of the national park – a first step towards increasing the management effectiveness. Internal communication is a basic precondition for the success of an evaluation and the subsequent implementation of the recommendations for action.

The opportunities offered by the introduction of comprehensive quality management, for which the project laid a first foundation stone, can be summarised briefly as follows:

- The optimisation of management,
- The discussion about the objectives of the work in the national park,
- Further development through the comparison of the current situation with the national and international specifications,
- Identifying and working on weak points,
- The evaluation of the management strategy with relation to the goals of the national park,
- Regular checks in order to ensure the continual improvement of the work of the national park, and
- A well-founded communication of progress inwardly and outwardly.

With the Research + Development project “Development of quality criteria and standards” a foundation stone was laid for quality management and the increase of effective management in German national parks. A broadly based and successfully tested quality set is now available, consisting of fields of action, criteria, standards and indicators.

Whether this will develop to a proper milestone depends above all on the prompt and energetic implementation. All national park administrations were actively involved in the development of the evaluation procedure and expressly approve of the application for their park.

The decision of the LANA working group from March 2008 can be regarded as a successful conclusion of the project. In this, LANA approved of the development of criteria and standards for national parks as an important German contribution towards the implementations of the Programme of Work on Protected Areas (CBD VII/28). LANA welcomes the fact that the Federal Ministry of the Environment has made possible the voluntary evaluation of the national parks. It also regards this as a significant German contribution towards achieving the 2010 objectives.

On the basis of this decision, the German federal government intends to provide financial support for the continuation of the project. This opens up the prospect of conducting an evaluation of all German national parks by the end of 2010 – a step towards the introduction of a permanent, comprehensive quality management system and thus an important contribution by Germany towards strengthening the worldwide system of protected areas.