



Management quality of German national parks

Results of the second evaluation



Nationalparke Deutschland



16 National Parks

We focus on letting nature be nature, to study it, and to share its fascination with everyone.



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|--|--|--|---|
| <p>Nationalpark Wattenmeer 1
SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN</p> | <p>Nationalpark Jasmund 5</p> | <p>Nationalpark Eifel 9</p> | <p>Nationalpark Hunsrück-Hochwald 13</p> |
| <p>Nationalpark Wattenmeer 2
HAMBURG</p> | <p>Müritz-Nationalpark 6</p> | <p>Nationalpark Kellerwald-Edersee 10</p> | <p>Nationalpark Bayerischer Wald 14</p> |
| <p>Nationalpark Wattenmeer 3
NIEDERSACHSEN</p> | <p>Nationalpark Unteres Odertal 7</p> | <p>Nationalpark Hainich 11</p> | <p>Nationalpark Schwarzwald 15</p> |
| <p>Nationalpark Vorpommersche Boddenlandschaft 4</p> | <p>Nationalpark Harz 8</p> | <p>Nationalpark Sächsische Schweiz 12</p> | <p>Nationalpark Berchtesgaden 16</p> |

Management quality of German national parks

Results of the second evaluation

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**View from Wolfswarte,
Harz National Park**

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Foreword

The global decline of biodiversity is one of the greatest ecological challenges of our time. With the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the international community of states committed in 1992 to halt the loss of species and habitats and to establish a globally representative and effectively managed system of protected areas. Germany implemented this commitment by ratifying the CBD in 1993 and through the National Biodiversity Strategy (NBS 2007). The National Biodiversity Strategy for the period up to 2030 (NBS 2030) continues on this path, responds to new developments, and takes up international agreements such as the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, including the target of effectively protecting at least 30 per cent of terrestrial and marine areas. Despite these far-reaching objectives, there remains a need for action in the protection of species and habitats, making it all the more urgent to consistently review and further develop the management of protected areas.

Within this context, national parks carry an outstanding responsibility and serve as role models. They embody the vision that nature should be allowed to follow its own dynamics across significant areas. They make a major contribution to the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services, while also providing spaces for experiencing nature, research, environmental education, and sustainable regional development.

In view of growing societal challenges – from natural climate protection and the connectivity of protected areas to recreation and sustainable tourism – national parks are also facing increasing demands that can only be met through consistently high-quality protected area management. As reference areas, national parks demonstrate how ecosystems and landscapes can develop without targeted management and proactive intervention.

Against this background, starting in 2005, quality criteria and standards for German national parks were developed on behalf of the Federal Ministry for the Environment, in cooperation with the federal government, the states, non-governmental organisations, and other experts, serving as a reference condition for “ideal,” effective protected area management. On this basis, the first evaluation of all German national parks was carried out from 2009 to 2012, supplemented by an interim survey from 2015 to 2018. Both surveys have shown that the national parks possess considerable strengths, have further developed since the first evaluation, and are jointly addressing the growing challenges. The establishment of two additional national parks – the Black Forest in 2014 and Hunsrück-Hochwald in 2015 – confirms the successful work carried out in protected areas and their national importance for the conservation of biodiversity and natural processes, as well as for scientific research, environmental education, and nature-compatible recreation. In the following years, the quality criteria and standards were revised and further developed, including aspects such as accessibility, sustainable procurement, and participation.



**Migrating avocets over Lower Saxon
Wadden Sea National Park**

This publication presents the evaluation process and the quality criteria and standards applied, and summarises the key results of the second evaluation of the German national parks for the period 2022–2024 in anonymised form. It provides a systematic overview of the strengths and weaknesses of management quality in all German national parks, compares the current status with the results of the first evaluation and the interim survey, and compiles the main recommendations for action. This evaluation documents the outstanding work carried out by the administrations involved in all national parks and clearly demonstrates the importance of national parks for nature conservation in Germany. The evaluation also identifies areas where further action is required and makes clear that the continuous review and optimisation of management quality are not an optional add-on but an essential prerequisite for safeguarding the performance of national parks in the long term in times of climate crisis, increasing land-use pressure, and societal change. In this way, they make a decisive contribution to achieving national and international biodiversity goals – and to preserving the natural foundations of life for future generations.



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President, Federal Agency for
Nature Conservation



Peter Südbeck
Chair of the Board, Nationale
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A few words to aid understanding of this publication

How successful are the German national parks, do they achieve the goals set for them, and how effectively can they carry out their tasks? What has already been achieved, and where is further action required? These questions – and, of course, the answers to them – were the subject of the second voluntary evaluation of the German national parks and form the content of this publication.

It neither can nor is intended to reproduce all evaluation results in detail, but rather to summarise them in a **comprehensive overview across all national parks**. Thus, the publication reflects general trends, from which the situation in individual national parks may well differ. The results are presented at varying levels of detail. Chapter 1 provides a very brief overview of the processes and results of the evaluation on one page, while Chapter 2 offers more detailed insights based on selected key findings of the evaluation. Chapter 3 provides some information on the background and procedure of the evaluation, and Chapter 4 presents the national parks according to their main characteristics and particular features. In Chapter 5, the results of the evaluation are presented systematically according to all criteria of the eight fields of action of the evaluation. For national park-specific results, reference is made to the detailed evaluation reports for each national park, where these are available online.

The result of the evaluation is **not a ranking** that compares the national parks to one another on a uniform scale and assesses them. This is neither possible nor meaningful due to differences in the natural conditions, the personnel and financial resources of the administrations, the regional context, the age of the national parks, their cultural and land-use history, or continuing uses. Rather, the evaluation aimed to assess each national park individually with regard to its specific strengths and weaknesses and to provide recommendations for action based on this assessment.

The publication cites key examples of these **strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations for action**, also in comparison with the first evaluation carried out between 2009 and 2012. The recommendations for action are often addressed to the national park administrations, but may also concern the responsible ministries and state governments, regional stakeholders, associations and organisations, administrations or political bodies, and in individual cases even federal authorities. The responsibility for securing what has already been achieved and for further improvements does not lie solely with the national park administrations.

All statements refer to the situation **at the time of data collection** by the national park administrations **and the on-site visits** by the evaluation committee. Subsequent changes are not taken into account.



1 For readers in a hurry: the key points on one page

Between 2022 and 2024, the German national parks were voluntarily evaluated for a second time by an independent committee. The evaluation was based on quality criteria and standards for eight activity areas, reflecting the tasks and objectives of the national parks and their administrations. The current situation in these activity areas was compared with the target described in the standards.

The data required for this were entered into a database by the national park administrations and also formed the basis for a one-and-a-half-day on-site visit by the evaluation committee, which summarised its results and assessments in a detailed report for each national park. The evaluation was led and organised by Nationale Naturlandschaften e.V. (registered Association of National Natural Landscapes), the umbrella organisation for German national parks, biosphere reserves, and wilderness areas. The Federal Agency for Nature Conservation supported the project with funding from the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Climate Protection, Nature Conservation, and Nuclear Safety.

The following are the main findings of the evaluation:

- 1) The central goal of national parks is to allow natural dynamic processes to occur across at least 75 % of their area without direct human management or use. Since the first evaluation from 2009 to 2012, many national parks have been able to move significantly closer to this goal, for example through the expansion of the natural dynamics zone or the overall area of the national park, or by completing forest conversion. Efforts to round off the boundaries of the national park area, to merge sub-areas, to reduce area fragmentation, and third-party rights have met with partial success or are continuing to be pursued. Nevertheless, the goal of leaving at least 75 % of their area entirely to natural dynamics still presents major challenges for many national parks today. Reasons include, for example, the size and shape of the national parks, fragmenting structures, visitor pressure, edge effects, difficult-to-remove third-party usage rights, or, in some cases, ongoing restoration or other management measures by the national park administrations. In particular, reducing wildlife management in the natural dynamics zone poses significant challenges for the national park administrations.
- 2) Key factors for management quality and success in the national parks are their personnel and financial resources. It deserves positive recognition that the staff of all national park administrations are well to very well trained, highly motivated, and that volunteers are involved in national park activities. This contributes significantly to the fact that the vast majority of the parks are largely accepted in their regions. Overall, the national park administrations have very different financial and personnel resources. Some are very well equipped, while others have seen a noticeable increase in staff since the first evaluation. However, all national park administrations have at least some personnel gaps in certain areas of responsibility, and in some cases, their financial and staffing levels can be described as wholly inadequate. These deficits negatively affect the fulfilment of tasks in all national parks, although to varying degrees. Depending on the national park, this concerns area management, visitor guidance and patrolling, regional and supra-regional cooperation, offers for education and experiencing nature, or research and monitoring, including the collection of baseline data.

Overall, it should be noted that since the first evaluation, and partly through the implementation of the recommendations made at that time, the national parks have been able to achieve considerable progress. They have generally been able to consolidate or even expand their strengths and reduce some weaknesses. Nevertheless, meeting all standards remains a challenge and a task for the national park administrations, the responsible ministries, and other relevant stakeholders.

2 On the right track, but not yet there: strengths, weaknesses and areas for action in the national parks at a glance

In this chapter, the key strengths and weaknesses of the German national parks are summarised, together with changes compared with the first evaluation (2009–2012) and the central resulting recommendations for action identified during the second evaluation (2022–2024).

Any changes that have occurred since then are not taken into account. The assessment was based on uniform criteria and standards assigned to a total of eight activity areas (see Chapter 3.2).

2.1 Primary task of national parks: allowing natural dynamic processes

In contrast to other protected areas, which focus on maintaining a specific state of habitats and their species – often dependent on human use – and on their active care and management, the primary conservation purpose of national parks is to allow natural dynamic processes to take place on sufficiently large areas with minimal or no human intervention – in other words, to let nature be nature. This should generally apply to at least 75 % of the area of a national park. Furthermore, it is of central importance to secure or expand habitats of international importance and to strengthen ecosystem connectivity between the national parks and their immediate and wider vicinity. These objectives are defined in more detail by the criteria and standards in Activity area 3, “Protection of natural biodiversity and dynamics.”

In the terrestrial national parks and the terrestrial parts of national parks with marine areas, significant progress has been made since the first evaluation, for example through the expansion of the natural dynamics zone. Only one terrestrial national park is still far from achieving the goal of allowing 75 % of its area to follow natural dynamics due to complex ownership structures. This target has also not yet been reached in the marine (sub)areas of five national parks. It is important to emphasise that these national parks are already more than 30 years old and can therefore no longer be considered “developmental” national parks, in which management measures are permitted on more than 25 % of the area. Nevertheless, improvements have also been achieved within the natural dynamics zones themselves. However, in the majority of national parks, they do not guarantee a completely undisturbed course of natural processes – whether due to insufficient size, an unfavourable delineation of the area, or the fragmenting effect of paths and infrastructure corridors, external influences, hard-to-remove third-party rights, or management measures by the national park administrations (wildlife management in particular).

All national parks contain species and/or habitats of international importance, which are for the most part incorporated into national park management in accordance with this importance. Ecosystem connectivity beyond the boundaries of the national park has been fully implemented in only about a quarter of the national parks; in the others, the standard is met to varying degrees.

Against this backdrop of overall positive development, albeit with remaining potential for improvement, the evaluation committee considers the following recommendations to be particularly urgent in Activity area 3, “Protection of natural biodiversity and dynamics”:

- Consistent transfer of areas into the natural dynamics zone in order to achieve the “75 % target” no later than 30 years after designation of the respective national park, or to achieve it as quickly as possible thereafter;
- Reduction of influences that restrict natural dynamics, in particular fragmentation and division of habitats, extractive uses, and exceptions allowing controlled management interventions;
- Expansion of ecosystem connectivity structures, including through support for international protected area designations for national parks located on state borders.

Management to enhance natural dynamics

The goal of allowing nature to take its course on at least 75 % of the national park area and refraining from interventions cannot be pursued and achieved in isolation. Rather, it requires intensive conceptual and planning preparation, including clarification of which areas should be left to natural development, when, and in what manner; which restoration measures are required beforehand; how to deal with species that depend on active land management in the long term; and how to respond to conflicts and external influences that continue to affect the natural dynamics zones. The tasks associated with this are addressed in Activity area 4, “Management.”

A heterogeneous picture emerges here, both between the national parks and within each individual park. It deserves positive recognition that in many national parks, forest conversion has now been completed, that in nearly half of the national parks no other restoration measures are still taking place in the natural dynamics zone, and that in almost all national parks the management of species and habitats is confined to the management zone. An exception is the “wildlife management” of species such as roe, red and fallow deer, or wild boar, which is carried out in almost all national parks with terrestrial areas, even within the natural dynamics zone. Despite the efforts of the national park administrations, only slow changes can be observed here. Uses that run counter to the conservation purpose of the national parks have been partially reduced; however, the removal of third-party usage rights is difficult, even within the natural dynamics zone, and can only be achieved in the long term. This issue is particularly serious in the “marine national parks”.

Visitor management concepts exist in almost all national parks to help avoid disturbances from visitors. However, in slightly more than half of the parks, the density of hiking trails still appears too high. Furthermore, in the majority of national parks, insufficient staffing – in particular of rangers – and, in some cases, insufficient statutory powers lead to shortcomings in visitor management and patrolling. Finally, it should be noted that a quarter of the national park plans are no longer up to date, or are incomplete in terms of content or spatial coverage, and should therefore be urgently revised.

To consolidate the progress made and to further approach standards where they have not yet been achieved, the following recommendations were made for Activity area 4, “Management”:

- Reduction of wildlife management, especially in the natural dynamics zone, including the immediate vicinity of the national park;
- Acceleration of the removal of third-party usage rights;
- Accelerated termination of some large-scale uses in the natural dynamics zone, in particular fishing;
- Strengthening of patrolling through regular and sufficient presence on site.

2.2 Only in harmony with the protection of natural dynamics: further tasks and objectives of national parks

While it is a central and priority objective of national parks to create space for largely undisturbed natural dynamics and processes, and thereby support species that depend on them, species-rich or particularly rare habitats that rely on a specific form of human use can also be maintained in the management zone. However, national parks are not areas that exclude people in principle, not even in the natural dynamics zones. On the contrary, in national parks, people are meant to experience nature that is largely left to itself, to relax within it, and to gain comprehensive information through environmental education. The resulting nature-based tourism can contribute to sustainable regional development. National parks are also of interest for science, not least because they allow observation of how ecosystems develop without direct human intervention – a particularly important field of research in times of climate change.

Only one thing must be taken into account: fulfilling these tasks must not jeopardise the primary conservation purpose of national parks, but must be carried out in harmony with it or, even better, actively promote and support it. Of course, all this requires comprehensive communication and close cooperation with regional and supra-regional stakeholders, which is indispensable for the acceptance of national parks among local populations and policymakers. The tasks mentioned here are addressed in Activity areas 5 “Cooperation and sustainable regional development,” 6 “External communication,” 7 “Education and nature experience,” and 8 “Research and monitoring,” as well as in the criteria and standards specified therein.

In activity areas 5 and 6, the national park administrations were able, with few exceptions, to maintain and in some cases even improve the level achieved in the first evaluation. They conduct intensive public relations work using a wide range of analogue and digital media, although the central message “let nature be nature” is still not communicated clearly enough in all national parks. All national park administrations work closely with regional stakeholder groups and involve them, as well as the local population, in relevant decisions. Conversely, the national park administrations bring their interests into planning processes in the immediate vicinity of the national park, although this does not always lead to corresponding outcomes. Beyond the regional context, the national park administrations collaborate with other national park administrations, contribute to a positive regional image, and are an important factor for tourism. This contributes to the acceptance of the national park in the region, although it must be continually reinforced, particularly in the event of incidents such as forest fires or large-scale bark beetle infestations. The workload associated with these tasks is very high. Despite the immense importance of communication and cooperation for the standing of the national park in the region, the national park administrations cannot always meet the many demands placed on them by external actors, even when staffing levels are adequate. This also affects the collection of data on real socio-economic effects of the national parks, as well as the evaluation of the effectiveness of communication and cooperation. Key recommendations are therefore:

- Increased and target-group-oriented emphasis on the core message “Let nature be nature”;
- Enhanced evaluation of the effectiveness of the national park administration’s communication measures;
- Regular assessment of the regional economic and social effects of the national park;
- Greater consideration of national park interests in projects and planning activities in the immediate vicinity of the national park that may negatively affect the national park.

The environmental education, nature experience, and recreation offers, as well as visitor infrastructure (Activity area 7), are excellent and diverse in all national parks. Accessibility and inclusion are implemented in all national parks at least in part; some national parks are exemplary in this regard and have established a unique selling point within Germany. A downside is that demand, in some cases, exceeds what can be offered with the available staff, though this also attests to the quality of the offers. In two national parks, visitor centres or information points are no longer equipped in a state-of-the-art manner due to insufficient resources. Even more critical is the fact that in three national parks, visitor behaviour or numbers occasionally pose a threat to conservation objectives.

The following recommendations are derived from these observations:

- Development of approaches to meet the high demand for educational offers despite staffing shortages;
- Regular evaluation of the educational and nature-experience programmes in the national park;
- Reduction of impacts on the national park caused by nature-experience activities;
- Preparation of plans for accessibility and inclusion.

In Activity area 8, “Research and monitoring,” the national parks differ considerably from one another. Four national parks that already demonstrated a high level of research, monitoring, and data management at the time of the first evaluation were able to maintain or even further improve this level. In contrast, there are four national parks whose activities were and remain at a very low level due to a lack of capacity. The remaining eight fall at various points between these extremes. Deficiencies exist, among other things, in that essential baseline data are missing or, if available, cannot be adequately analysed and applied to management; monitoring of significant changes is only possible to a limited extent; research results are not published (internationally); and finally, the potential inherent in studying natural dynamic processes – including for the development of areas outside the national parks – is not being utilised. Key resulting recommendations are:

- Expansion of digital infrastructure (software and hardware, storage capacity) to enable effective and efficient analysis of large datasets;
- Enhanced use of results from research and monitoring for management purposes;
- Greater utilisation of the potential of studying natural dynamics as a reference for the development of land used areas outside the national park.

2.3 The basis of success: suitable framework conditions, sufficient resources, and good organisation

To achieve the primary conservation purpose of national parks outlined in Chapter 2.1, and to fulfil the additional tasks described in Chapter 2.2, suitable conditions are required. These include, among other things, a clear legal framework regarding conservation purposes, planning requirements, the responsibilities of the national park administration, property rights, and spatial delineation of the national park. Equally important are financial and personnel resources appropriate to the tasks, sufficient decision-making powers of the national park administration, and, not least, motivated and committed staff. Statements on these fundamental conditions for the success of national parks are provided in Activity area 1 “Framework conditions” and 2 “Organisation.”

The criteria contained in Activity area field 1 “Framework conditions” relate both to the area of the national park (legal basis, conservation purpose, overarching planning principles, boundaries and delineation) and to its administration (legal basis, responsibilities, ownership). Overall, the situation has remained largely unchanged since the first evaluation. The area of all national parks is legally protected and spatially defined through national park acts or national park ordinances. The primary conservation purpose is sufficiently described for all national parks, but in only about half of the areas is it clearly emphasised relative to other objectives. In some national parks, exceptions allowing other uses also jeopardise the primary conservation purpose. In three quarters of the national parks, this is the case due to other legal requirements. Furthermore, the Natura 2000 requirements for maintaining a favourable conservation status of habitats and the national park objectives are not sufficiently aligned in all national parks. Most national parks meet the minimum size of 10,000 ha; if not, they are of outstanding international importance. Since the first evaluation, two national parks have been expanded, and in three others this could be achieved in the medium term. However, roughly half of the national parks are still fragmented by infrastructure corridors or small settlements, or their quality is impaired due to an unfavourable spatial configuration. With one exception, the national park administrations possess the mandatory authority as lower nature conservation authorities within the national park, and in many cases also as regulatory, forestry, or hunting authorities. However, to act comprehensively and effectively, almost all national park administrations require additional official powers. Because the vast majority of national park areas are publicly owned, in particular by the respective federal state, conflicts arising from ownership issues are largely avoided. Key recommendations are:

- In the case of revision/amendment of national park act or national park ordinance: a) clearer emphasis on the primary conservation purpose “natural dynamics,” b) removal of exceptions for uses that conflict with the primary conservation purpose and other conservation purposes, c) integration of Natura 2000 requirements relevant to the national park;
- Consistent continuation of efforts to reduce the degree of fragmentation;
- Continuation or intensification of efforts to round off boundaries and explore options for expanding the national park.

In Activity area 2 “Organisation”, the vast majority of national parks have seen slight improvements since the first evaluation. This relates in particular to their integration into the administration as an independent special authority subordinated to the highest nature conservation authority, improvements in staffing, and the structures for volunteer management. Furthermore, the majority of national park administrations are able to carry out their tasks to a satisfactory/good extent with the available personnel and financial resources, although in no national park can this be achieved without any limitations. These range from minor deficiencies in three national parks to an absolutely insufficient personnel and/or financial capacity in four national parks. In each national park administration, qualified staff are lacking in certain areas of work. Particularly problematic is that in twelve national parks, the number of rangers is insufficient to adequately cover even the priority tasks (environmental education, patrolling).

Due to the absence of nationwide standards for their training, their qualifications are also inconsistent, as are their pay grades, which are partly too low. On the “credit side,” national park administrations are generally able to participate in personnel decisions, and in roughly half of the national parks, there is the possibility to use financial resources flexibly. Particularly positive is that the staff in all national parks are well to very well trained and highly motivated. The resulting commitment, as well as the support of volunteers in various tasks, contributes significantly to the fact that the vast majority of national parks are largely accepted in their regions. Potential for improvement lies in internal communication and personnel management, where national park-specific staff development concepts are mostly lacking. This potential must be leveraged to continue attracting qualified and motivated people to work in a national park in the future.



In the restored slope mires of Hunsrück-Hochwald National Park, cranberry can be found – a species specialised for nutrient-poor sites

It cannot be emphasised enough that the weaknesses in financial and personnel resources described here – varying in extent between national parks – have a negative impact on all other activity areas and thus contribute significantly, though not exclusively, to the deficits observed there.

Key recommendations for further improvement or to address the weaknesses identified are:

- Improvement of staffing, with particular focus on patrolling, research and monitoring, and ranger service;
- Development of personnel development plans where not yet available;
- Ongoing training for rangers;
- Increase in financial resources.

2.4 Conclusion and outlook

In all national parks, the strengths and achievements identified during the first evaluation have, with only isolated exceptions in individual national parks, been maintained, while deficits have been reduced. This can be attributed, in part, to the implementation of the recommendations issued at that time and, not least, to the high level of commitment of the staff in the national park administrations. Nevertheless, each national park continues to face challenges and deficits in achieving its objectives, with significant differences between the national parks. The causes of this lie partly in the history and spatial context of the areas, in various factors within the national park administrations and, not least, in structural, financial, legal, and political framework conditions. To safeguard the achievements made so far and to further improve management quality, responsibility does not always – or solely – rest with the national park administrations; depending on jurisdiction and scope for action, it also lies with other regional actors, state ministries, and in some cases even federal authorities.

Accordingly, of a total of 718 recommendations, 546 (76 %) are addressed to the national park administrations, 289 (40 %) to state ministries, and 214 (30 %) to other actors. There are, therefore, recommendations whose implementation requires several actors to work together. For 341 recommendations (48 %), the national park administration is solely responsible; for 203 (28 %), responsibility is shared with others; and 174 (24 %) fall outside their remit. All actors addressed are thus called upon, even under potentially more restrictive financial conditions in the future, to contribute to the comprehensive achievement of the goal “let nature be nature,” which is equally important for nature and people, as well as to the further objectives of the national parks. In roughly ten years, a third evaluation – useful for regular quality assurance – could indicate whether and to what extent this has been accomplished. For the first time, it could also build on the now available international standards of the IUCN Green List.

3 National park evaluation: background, process, stakeholders

3.1 A brief history of the national park evaluation

The creation of a global network of terrestrial and marine protected areas, along with the simultaneous establishment of their effective management, is the main objective of the Programme of Work on Protected Areas (CBD VII/28; 2004 ff.) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (1992). Beginning in 2005, the federal government (Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, using funds from the Federal Ministry for the Environment) has therefore supported and promoted the development of corresponding quality criteria and standards for German national parks, as well as the evaluation of the management quality of the national parks based on these criteria.

Besides the umbrella organisation of Germany's large protected areas (EUROPARC Deutschland e.V., since 2020 Nationale Naturlandschaften e.V.), all national park administrations, representatives of the federal government, state environment ministries, the scientific community, and non-governmental environmental and nature conservation organisations have been closely involved in the evaluation process from the very beginning.

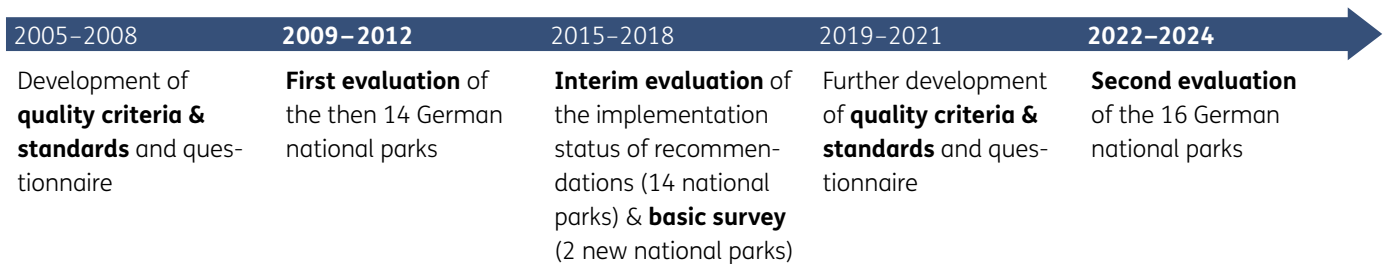


Figure 1: Evaluation process of German national parks

From **2009 to 2012**, the **first evaluation** of the then 14 German national parks was conducted. In the initial step, the national park administrations answered a questionnaire for each activity area. These self-assessments of the current situation, along with subsequent on-site visits to the protected areas, including discussions with stakeholders, served as the basis for the evaluation committee to carry out a strengths-weaknesses analysis and derive recommendations for action. The results were presented in 14 protected area-specific evaluation reports as well as in an anonymised **cross-sectional analysis** covering all national parks. It became evident that the national parks had considerable strengths, but there were also weaknesses affecting all activity areas overall. On average, just under 80 recommendations per national park were issued to help maintain existing strengths and successes in the long term and to address weaknesses in the short, medium, and long term, thereby meeting the quality standards. The evaluation increased the political visibility and importance of the national parks and improved the perception of the strengths and weaknesses of a national park among the relevant state ministries. Among the national park administrations, it intensified self-reflection and promoted communication and networking between the national parks.

From **2015 to 2018**, an **interim evaluation** was conducted to evaluate the **implementation status of the first evaluation's recommendations**, again based on self-assessments by the national park administrations. By the end of January 2016, approximately 23 % of all recommendations had already been fully implemented, and about 43 % partially implemented. For the remaining third, implementation had not yet begun for a variety of reasons. Overall, however, the survey confirmed the impetus that the evaluation had provided for improving management quality in all German national parks. In parallel with the interim evaluation, a **baseline survey** was conducted for the two **national parks newly established** in 2014 and 2015, Black Forest and Hunsrück-Hochwald. This survey did not cover all aspects, but included the essential elements of the first evaluation carried out in the other national parks, and also resulted in recommendations for action.

From **2022 to 2024**, the **second evaluation** of the national parks was conducted based on an advanced set of quality criteria and standards (see Chapter 3.2). It aims to establish a regular ten-year evaluation cycle – while maintaining the procedure and methodology of the first evaluation. A new aspect of the reports was a comparison between the results of the first, the intermediate, and the current evaluation.

3.2 Basis of the assessment: the evaluation criteria

Between 2005 and 2008, quality criteria and standards for German national parks were developed for the first time and endorsed by the Working Group on Nature Conservation, Landscape Management and Recreation (LANA) as an important contribution by Germany to the implementation of the Programme of Work on Protected Areas. The quality set comprised ten activity areas and 44 quality criteria, each of which was assigned a corresponding quality standard. Each standard describes a clearly defined target state to be achieved by the national park or the national park administration.

The initial and interim evaluations made it clear that some criteria and standards needed to be formulated more precisely – and, where appropriate, more concisely – and supplemented with new content in light of current developments and societal challenges, for example in the context of topics such as wilderness, sustainability, participation, and inclusion. As a result, the quality set was further developed between 2019 and 2021. It was ensured that the new criteria and standards would still allow for comparability of results with the first evaluation. The new quality set, also endorsed by LANA, consists of eight activity areas with 42 quality criteria.

<p>Activity area 1: Framework conditions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1 Legal foundations 1.2 Conservation purposes 1.3 Overriding planning principles 1.4 Responsibilities 1.5 Ownership rights 1.6 Boundaries and delineation 	<p>Activity area 5: Cooperation and sustainable regional development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5.1 National and international cooperation 5.2 Regional cooperation 5.3 Integrating the national park into its region 5.4 Participation 5.5 Appreciation of the national park 5.6 Connecting national park and public transport 5.7 Impulses for the region
<p>Activity area 2: Organisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1 Administrative function, tasks, and staffing of the national park administration 2.2 Personnel management 2.3 Ranger service 2.4 Volunteer management 2.5 Environmental management and sustainable procurement 2.6 Financing 2.7 Advisory boards and boards of trustees 	<p>Activity area 6: External communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6.1 Communication structure 6.2 Corporate design
<p>Activity area 3: Protection of natural biodiversity and dynamics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3.1 Space for natural dynamics 3.2 Zoning 3.3 Habitats of international importance 3.4 Ecosystem networking 	<p>Activity area 7: Education and nature experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7.1 Education strategy 7.2 Educational programmes 7.3 Opportunities for nature experiences and recreation 7.4 Visitor infrastructure 7.5 Accessibility and inclusion
<p>Activity area 4: Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4.1 National park vision 4.2 National park plan 4.3 Restoration 4.4 Species and habitat management 4.5 Regulations on usage 4.6 Visitor management 4.7 Patrolling 4.8 Monitoring the success of measures 	<p>Activity area 8: Research and monitoring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8.1 Research content and research coordination 8.2 Monitoring 8.3 Documentation

Figure 2: The eight activity areas and their associated quality criteria

3.3 The evaluation committee

For both the 2009–2012 and the 2022–2024 evaluations, an evaluation committee was appointed, comprising representatives from the federal government, the federal states, the scientific community, the National Parks Working Group, non-governmental organisations, and the umbrella organisation of German large protected areas (at that time EUROPARC Deutschland e.V., since 2020 Nationale Naturlandschaften e.V.; NNL).

In both evaluations, the evaluation committee consisted of 14 members: two representatives of the federal government (Federal Ministry for the Environment and Federal Agency for Nature Conservation), four from the environmental ministries of the federal states, four from the scientific community, two from the National Parks Working Group (a working group of the national park directors under the umbrella of NNL e.V.), and two from non-governmental organisations. LANA approved the appointment of the committee members proposed by the Federal Ministry for the Environment. The process was led

and coordinated by NNL e.V. At each on-site evaluation, only seven members of the evaluation committee participated, so that while the composition differed for each national park, it was ensured that all of the above-mentioned groups were represented in every evaluation.

As part of the evaluations, the committee assessed the extent to which the quality standards were being met in the national parks and formulated specific recommendations for action based on the identified strengths and weaknesses. A comparative “ranking” of the national parks was explicitly not the goal of the evaluation, since this would not be meaningful due to differences in natural conditions, staffing and financial resources of the national park administrations, the regional context, the age of the national parks, or their cultural and land-use history. Instead, the focus was on evaluating each individual national park with regard to its specific strengths and weaknesses and on deriving correspondingly tailored recommendations for action.



3.4 The 2022–2024 evaluation: process and methodology

To compare the target values of the quality standards with the current state in the national parks, a questionnaire with open and closed questions was used, which the national park administrations completed. As part of the second evaluation, a browser-based evaluation database was first developed and activated for the national park administrations for their respective areas. The responses from the database query regarding the current state of the national parks and the degree to which the quality standards were met formed the basis for all evaluations and were therefore included as the actual situation in the first draft of the site-specific evaluation reports.

Building on this, on-site visits were conducted in all 16 national parks. These generally included a half-day tour of the national park with selected excursion points, a full-day exchange between the evaluation committee and the

staff of the national park administration, and meetings with representatives of the responsible state ministries as well as key stakeholders from the respective national park regions – including representatives from non-governmental organisations, friends' associations, municipal administrations and tourism associations, authorities such as water management or coastal protection, and user groups from forestry, agriculture, and fisheries. The aim was to gain as comprehensive a picture as possible of the current situation, challenges, and development perspectives of the national parks.

Subsequently, the evaluation committee compared the target state of each quality criterion with the observed current situation and identified the corresponding strengths and weaknesses. Finally, the results were compared with those of the first evaluation to determine whether and how the situation had changed – i. e., whether improvements or deterioration had occurred. Based on the identified strengths and weaknesses, the committee derived recommendations for action, prioritised both in terms of expertise and timing, to safeguard or improve management quality. On average, 45 recommendations were issued per national park, with the figures ranging between 24 and 66. The reports average around 60 pages and underwent extensive coordination processes between the evaluation committee, the NNL office, and the national park administrations. Before the final version was issued, the national park administrations were asked to review the reports for technical accuracy.

The final evaluation reports are produced in the “National Natural Landscapes” corporate design. The release and, where applicable, publication of the evaluation reports for the individual national park are carried out by the competent state ministries. Once published, the reports can be accessed via the websites of the respective national park.



Evaluation committee, protected area administration, and state ministry during the on-site visit to Kellerwald-Edersee National Park

4 The German national parks at a glance – key data on fact sheets

The following fact sheets provide an overview of the essential data for each national park. All fact sheets were completed by the respective national park administration as part of the self-assessment, following a uniform template.

Bavarian Forest National Park

All data refer to the reference dates of the national park administration's self-assessment on 21 February 2024 and the on-site visit from 14–17 April 2024. Data may have changed by the time of the final editing of this publication.

Year of establishment and federal state	1970, Bavaria
Size	24,980.33 ha
Administrative structure / organisational affiliation	The national park administration is an independent special authority. It reports directly to the Bavarian State Ministry for Environment and Consumer Protection (StMUV). The Ministry exercises administrative and technical supervision and acts as the highest nature conservation authority.
Zoning	Natural zone (corresponding to the natural dynamics zone): 18,824.59 ha / 75.36 % Management zone: 5,647.40 ha / 22.61 % Recreation zone: 508.29 ha / 2.03 % In this publication, the management and recreation zones are both considered part of the management zone.
Land ownership structure	State forest: 99.5 % Non-state forest: 0.5 %
Key habitats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Montane spruce forests, montane mixed forests, spruce forests (cool valley type) • Fens, transition mires, and raised bogs • Montane watercourses • Nardus grasslands and mountain hay meadows
Key species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Montane spruce forests: wolf, capercaillie, three-toed woodpecker, European spruce bark beetle, sandwich click beetle, red-belted bracket fungus • Montane mixed forests: red-breasted flycatcher, white-backed woodpecker, European spruce bark beetle, red deer, wolf, lynx, beaver, tinder fungus, shelf fungus: <i>Phellinidium nigrolimitatus</i> • Spruce forests (cool valley type): beaver, European spruce bark beetle, black stork • Peatlands: ground beetle: <i>Carabus menetriesi pacholei</i>, clouded yellow butterfly • Watercourses: white-throated dipper, bullhead, otter, brown trout



Berchtesgaden National Park

All data refer to the reference dates of the national park administration's self-assessment on 22 February 2024 and the on-site visit from 17–19 April 2024. Data may have changed by the time of the final editing of this publication.

Year of establishment and federal state	1978, Bavaria
Size	20,808 ha
Administrative structure / organisational affiliation	The national park administration is an independent special authority. It is directly subordinate to the Bavarian State Ministry of the Environment and Consumer Protection (StMUV). The StMUV exercises both administrative and technical supervision. The Ministry is the highest nature conservation authority.
Zoning	Core zone (corresponding to the natural dynamics zone): 15,607 ha (75 %) Buffer zone (corresponding to the management zone): 5,195 ha (25 %)
Land ownership structure	Federal government: 0.006 % Federal state: 99.99 %
Key habitats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forests: floodplain forests; broadleaved forests (submontane); montane mixed forests; spruce-larch forests (subalpine); larch–Swiss stone pine forests (subalpine) • Scrub, krummholz (stunted shrubs): dwarf mountain pine scrub, green alder scrub, dwarf shrub heaths • Open habitats: lowland hay meadows, alpine pastures, tall-herb communities; raised bogs, fens, and spring mires; alpine grassland and snowbeds; glaciers, firn fields, and perennial snow; scree; rock faces; caves and rock crevices • Water bodies, oligotrophic to mesotrophic lakes; perennial ponds, temporary ponds; alpine rivers and streams
Key species	<p>Forests:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Floodplain forests: hoary willow <i>Salix eleagnos</i> • Broadleaved forests (submontane): European beech • Montane mixed forests: silver fir • Spruce-larch forests (subalpine): Norway spruce, European larch • Larch-Swiss stone pine forests (subalpine): Swiss stone pine <p>Scrub, krummholz:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dwarf mountain pine scrub: dwarf mountain pine • Green alder scrub: green alder <p>Dwarf shrub heaths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Rhododendron ferrugineum</i> <p>Offenland:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lowland hay meadows, alpine pastures, tall-herb communities: <i>Sesleria varia</i>, <i>Nardus stricta</i>, <i>Carex ferruginea</i> • Raised bogs, fens, spring mires: <i>Sphagnum</i> spp. • Alpine swards and snowbeds: <i>Carex firma</i>, <i>Soldanella alpina</i> • Scree: <i>Linaria alpina</i>, <i>Aquilegia einseleana</i> • Caves, rock crevices: <i>Cystopteris fragilis</i> • Oligotrophic to mesotrophic lakes: stoneworts (Charophytes), lake brown trout (<i>Salmo trutta lacustris</i>), Arctic char • Alpine rivers and streams: European bullhead



Eifel National Park

All data refer to the reference dates of the national park administration's self-assessment on 19 July 2022 and the on-site visit from 16–18 November 2022. Data may have changed by the time of the final editing of this publication.

Year of establishment and federal state	2004, North Rhine-Westphalia
Size	10,871 ha
Administrative structure / organisational affiliation	Supervisory authority lies with the Ministry for Environment, Agriculture, Nature Conservation and Consumer Protection of North Rhine-Westphalia, which also serves as the highest nature conservation authority. The national park administration is part of the Landesbetrieb Wald und Holz and is therefore not an independent special authority. The State Enterprise also exercises technical supervision.
Zoning	Natural process protection zone Ia: 5,564.43 ha/51.18 % Natural process protection zone Ib: 2,522.88 ha/23.21 % Natural process protection zones Ia and Ib correspond to the natural dynamics zone in this publication. Natural process protection zone Ic (corresponds to development zone): 1,314.12 ha/12.09 % Zone II (corresponds to management zone): 1,470.26 ha/13.52 %
Land ownership structure	Federal government: 29.32 % Federal state: 67.41 % Municipalities: 3.04 % Foundations: 0.16 % Private: 0.08 %
Key habitats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subatlantic-influenced hill to montane mixed beech forests on siliceous bedrock • Sessile oak forests on dry, shallow soils (partly maintained by historical land use) • Natural and near-natural watercourses, springs • Species-rich, extensively used upland grasslands • Mesotrophic reservoirs
Key species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European beech, sycamore maple, wildcat, black woodpecker, middle spotted woodpecker, black stork • Wild service tree, field maple, Norway maple, dog's mercury, middle spotted woodpecker, Bechstein's bat • Brown trout, bullhead, brook lamprey, beautiful demoiselle, beaver, Iberian water shrew • Wild daffodil, spignel, violet copper butterfly, bog fritillary, skylark, meadow pipit, red kite, wart-biter bush-cricket, red deer • European perch, northern pike, roach, beaver, cormorant, grey heron



Hainich National Park

All data refer to the reference dates of the national park administration's self-assessment on 25 August 2022 and the on-site visit from 23–25 January 2023. Data may have changed by the time of the final editing of this publication.

Year of establishment and federal state	1997, Thuringia
Size	7,500 ha
Administrative structure / organisational affiliation	The administrative and technical supervision of the national park administration lies with the Thuringian Ministry for Environment, Energy, Nature Conservation and Forestry. The Ministry also serves as the highest nature conservation authority. The national park administration reports directly to this Ministry and is an independent special authority.
Zoning	Protection zone I (corresponds to natural dynamics zone): 5,625 ha / 75 % Protection zone II (corresponds to management zone): 1,875 ha / 25 %
Land ownership structure	Federal state: 94.5 % Municipalities: 5.4 % Private: 0.08 %
Key habitats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deciduous forest habitats • Reforestation areas • Grazing habitats with small waterbodies
Key species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deciduous trees, especially beech; European wildcat, woodpeckers • Hedgerow-breeding birds, e.g. red-backed shrike, great grey shrike, barred warbler • Grassland-breeding species, such as whinchat, meadow pipit, marsh fritillary, yellow-bellied toad



Harz National Park

All data refer to the reference dates of the national park administration's self-assessment on 3 May 2023 and the on-site visit from 5–7 June 2023. Data may have changed by the time of the final editing of this publication.

Year of establishment and federal state	1990, Saxony-Anhalt 1994, Lower Saxony
Size	24,732 ha
Administrative structure / organisational affiliation	<p>Lower Saxony (NI): Administrative and technical supervision of the national park administration lies with the Lower Saxony Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Climate Protection. The national park administration is directly subordinate to the Ministry.</p> <p>Saxony-Anhalt (ST): Administrative supervision of the national park administration lies with the Ministry for Economic Affairs, Tourism, Agriculture and Forestry of the Federal State of Saxony-Anhalt, to which the national park administration is directly subordinate. Technical supervision lies with the Ministry for Science, Energy, Climate Protection and the Environment of the Federal State of Saxony-Anhalt.</p> <p>The national park administration is not an independent special authority.</p>
Zoning	<p>Natural dynamics zone: 17,335.03 ha/70.1 %</p> <p>Nature development zone II: 7,103.67 ha/28.7 %</p> <p>Use zone: 177.84 ha/0.7 %, plus 114.98 ha/0.5 % water bodies</p> <p>In this publication, the nature development and use zones correspond to the management zone.</p>
Land ownership structure	<p>Federal state: 98.7 %</p> <p>Municipalities: 0.1 %</p> <p>Private: 1.1 %</p>
Key habitats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spruce forests • Beech forests • Peatlands • Watercourses • Rock outcrops and stone runs • Montane grasslands and Nardus grasslands • Dwarf shrub heaths
Key species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European spruce bark beetle in spruce forests • Lynx and wolf as apex predators and sources of carrion in terrestrial ecosystems • Brown trout as the main predator in running waters • Red deer in forest ecosystems • Great spotted woodpecker and black woodpecker as primary creators of tree cavities • Red-belted bracket fungus in spruce forests and tinder fungus in beech forests as important wood decomposers, food resources, and breeding habitats for numerous invertebrates



Hunsrück-Hochwald National Park

All data refer to the reference dates of the national park administration's self-assessment on 20 June 2022 and the on-site visit from 14–16 November 2022. Data may have changed by the time of the final editing of this publication.

Year of establishment and federal state	2015, Rhineland-Palatinate and Saarland
Size	10,200 ha
Administrative structure / organisational affiliation	The technical and administrative supervision of the national park administration is the responsibility of the respective state environmental ministry (Ministry for Climate Protection, Environment, Energy and Mobility of Rhineland-Palatinate; Ministry for Environment, Climate, Mobility, Agriculture and Consumer Protection of Saarland). Both ministries are simultaneously the highest nature conservation authority. They exercise technical supervision in their respective state areas. The national park administration is organisationally directly subordinate to the Rhineland-Palatinate ministry. It is an independent special authority.
Zoning	Nature zone 1a: 5,038.80 ha / 49.4 % Nature zone 1b: 2,611.20 ha / 25.6 % Nature zones 1a and 1b correspond to the natural dynamics zone in this publication. Buffer zone (corresponding to the management zone): 2,550 ha / 25 %
Land ownership structure	Federal state: 99.5 % Private: 0.13 %
Key habitats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wood-rush-beech forest (Luzulo-Fagetum), slope peatlands, spring peatlands, transitional peatlands, downy birch alder carr, quartzite cliffs, quartzite boulder scree (so-called Rossel screes), partly with rowan-Carpathian birch forests, anthropogenic spruce forests after peatland drainage or conversion of beech forests • Nardus grasslands, arnica meadows, hummock meadows • Acid low mountain streams
Key species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European beech • Downy birch, <i>Sphagnum</i> spp., cranberry, cotton-grass, sundew • Carpathian birch, lichens



Jasmund National Park

All data refer to the reference dates of the national park administration's self-assessment on 9 December 2022 and the on-site visit from 29–31 March 2023. Data may have changed by the time of the final editing of this publication.

Year of establishment and federal state	1990, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania
Size	3,071 ha, of which 615 ha are marine areas
Administrative structure / organisational affiliation	The technical and administrative supervision of the national park administration is held by the State Ministry for the Environment (Ministry for Climate Protection, Agriculture, Rural Areas and Environment of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania). The Ministry also serves as the highest nature conservation authority. The national park administration reports directly to this Ministry. As part of the Western Pomerania National Park Office, it is an independent special authority.
Zoning	<p>Protection zone I (core zone): 2,791 ha/90.88 %</p> <p>Protection zone I corresponds to the natural dynamics zone in this publication.</p> <p>Protection zone IIa (development zone): 59 ha/1.92 %</p> <p>Protection zone IIb (buffer zone): 15 ha/0.49 %</p> <p>Protection zone III (recreation zone): 12 ha/0.39 %</p> <p>The management zone consists of protection zones II and III, as well as the 194 ha (6.32 %) traffic safety management area along public roads and buildings adjacent to the forest.</p>
Land ownership structure	<p>Federal government: 20.94 %</p> <p>Federal state: 73.46 %</p> <p>Municipalities: 1.07 %</p> <p>Foundations: 0.78 %</p> <p>Private: 3.71 %</p>
Key habitats	<p>Shallow-water and coastal ecosystems of the Baltic Sea:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unconsolidated rock cliff ecosystems of the Pleistocene and Cretaceous • Chalk cliff ecosystems • Block-rich shallow-water and beach ecosystems <p>Terrestrial ecosystems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forest ecosystems on Cretaceous and Pleistocene substrates (mainly beech forests) • Hillside forests • Stream ecosystems • Peatland ecosystems • Chalk quarries
Key species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White-tailed eagle, peregrine falcon • Fire-bellied toad, crested newt • Red deer • Orchids: lady orchid (<i>Orchis purpurea</i>), common spotted orchid (<i>Dactylorhiza fuchsii</i>), fragrant orchid (<i>Gymnadenia conopsea</i>)



Kellerwald-Edersee National Park

All data refer to the reference dates of the national park administration's self-assessment on 20 July 2023 and the on-site visit from 25–27 January 2023. Data may have changed by the time of the final editing of this publication.

Year of establishment and federal state	2004, Hesse
Size	7,688 ha (5,739 ha previous national park area and 1,949 ha new national park area) At the time of the evaluation, national park planning was still pending, including zoning for the new national park area.
Administrative structure / organisational affiliation	The technical and administrative supervision of the national park administration is held by the Hesse Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, Viticulture, Forestry, Hunting and Homeland. The Ministry is simultaneously the highest nature conservation authority. The national park administration is directly subordinated to this Ministry (Department of Forestry, Hunting and Nature Conservation) and is an independent special authority.
Zoning	Nature zone (corresponds to the natural dynamics zone): 5,475 ha/95.4 % Development zone: 44 ha/0.77 % Buffer zone: 220 ha/3.83 % In this publication, development and buffer zones are combined as the management zone.
Land ownership structure	Federal government: 0.02 % Federal state: 96.82 % Municipalities: 0.43 % Church: 0.04 % Private: 1.92 %
Key habitats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acidophilous beech forests, dry and wet woodland types, springs and streams • Extensively managed meadows, unimproved grassland, and heathland • Rocks and stone runs
Key species	<p>Relatively complete biocoenoses of old Central European broadleaved forests:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large birds of old near-natural forests: black stork, red kite, northern goshawk, eagle owl, honey buzzard, raven, and six woodpecker species • 19 of 21 bat species found in Hesse • 34 primeval forest relic species (especially xylobiont beetles) • Xylobiont old-forest fungi species • Large mammals: wildcat, red deer, wild boar • Distributional peculiarities and relict occurrences of the flora: Cheddar pink, St Bernard's lily, three-toothed orchid, small white sedge, <i>Sesleria</i> grass species, among others



Müritz National Park

All data refer to the reference dates of the national park administration's self-assessment on 15 November 2023 and the on-site visit from 22–24 January 2024. Data may have changed by the time of the final editing of this publication.

Year of establishment and federal state	1990, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania
Size	32,200 ha
Administrative structure / organisational affiliation	The national park administration is an independent special authority. It is subordinate to the Ministry for Climate Protection, Agriculture, Rural Areas and Environment of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. The Ministry holds technical and administrative supervision over the national park. The Ministry is the highest forestry and nature conservation authority.
Zoning	<p>Protection zone I (core zone): 9,420 ha / 29 %</p> <p>Protection zone II (buffer zone): 857 ha / 3 %</p> <p>Protection zone III (development zone): 21,922 ha / 68 %</p> <p>(Status according to national park ordinance of 1990)</p> <p>Currently, 82 % of the national park area can be assigned to the natural dynamics zone and 18 % to the management zone (implementation status not yet legally binding).</p>
Land ownership structure	<p>Federal government: 12.55 %</p> <p>Federal state: 67.67 %</p> <p>Municipalities: 6.04 %</p> <p>Foundations: 5.46 %</p> <p>Church: 0.39 %</p> <p>Private: 7.83 %</p>
Key habitats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primarily: forests (71 %), lakes (14 %), near-natural peatlands (8 %) • Secondly: grasslands/pastures, heathlands, dry grasslands, arable land
Key species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White-tailed eagle, osprey, crane (resting and breeding area), peregrine falcon • Forests: Tengmalm's owl, honey buzzard, black woodpecker, middle spotted woodpecker, red-breasted flycatcher, Barbastelle bat, xylobiontic beetles (at least 240 species), fungi (at least 693 species), red deer • Lakes: Charophyceae species, otter, the diving beetle species <i>Dytiscus latissimus</i>, goldeneye, great bittern, vendace, spined loach • Peatlands: sphagnum mosses, swamp sawgrass, round-leaved sundew, green-winged orchid, the common gentian sub-species <i>baltica</i>, moor frog



Saxon Switzerland National Park

All data refer to the reference dates of the national park administration's self-assessment on 15 June 2023 and the on-site visit from 16–18 October 2023. Data may have changed by the time of the final editing of this publication.

Year of establishment and federal state	1990, Saxony
Size	9,344 ha
Administrative structure / organisational affiliation	The national park administration is part of the state enterprise Sachsenforst as the Office for Large Protected Areas, which falls under the direct administrative and technical supervision of the Saxon State Ministry for Energy, Climate Protection, Environment and Agriculture (SMEKUL). In matters of nature conservation, the national park administration is directly subject to the technical supervision of the Nature Conservation Department of SMEKUL. Sachsenforst, as the state forestry administration and Office for Large Protected Areas, is an independent special authority.
Zoning	Nature zone A: 3,482 ha/37.3 % Nature zone B: 5,388 ha/57.7 % Buffer zone: 473 ha/5 % Natural dynamics zone 7,089.42 ha (75.9 %) = core zone: nature zone A and parts of nature zone B Management zone 2,255.09 ha (24.1 %) = managed area: parts of nature zone B and the buffer zone
Land ownership structure	Federal state: 89.73 % Municipalities: 1.03 % Foundations: 0.09 % Church: 0.01 % Private: 10.1 % Trust: 0.04 %
Key habitats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rock formations (quartz sandstone) • Forests, originally upper colline to submontane acidophilous beech forests • Watercourses • Meadows
Key species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rocks: peregrine falcon, eagle-owl, crowberry, various lichens • Gorges: marsh Labrador tea, twisted stalk, alpine yellow-violet • Forests: lynx, edible dormouse, bats (Alcathoe bat, greater mouse-eared bat, Bechstein's bat, barbastelle bat); black stork, pygmy owl, Tengmalm's owl, black woodpecker, grey-headed woodpecker, red-breasted flycatcher; forest-dwelling xylobionts; silver fir • Watercourses: otter; kingfisher, white-throated dipper; Atlantic salmon, brook lamprey, bullhead, brown trout; stream macrozoobenthos • Meadows: broad-leaved marsh orchid, oxeye daisy, quaking grass



Black Forest National Park

All data refer to the reference dates of the national park administration's self-assessment on 23 May 2023 and the on-site visit from 5–7 July 2023. Data may have changed by the time of the final editing of this publication.

Year of establishment and federal state	2014, Baden-Württemberg
Size	10,062 ha
Administrative structure / organisational affiliation	The administrative and technical supervision of the national park administration lies with the Ministry of the Environment, Climate and Energy Sector of Baden-Württemberg. The Ministry is also the highest nature conservation authority. The national park administration reports directly to the Ministry and is an independent special authority.
Zoning	Core zone (corresponds to the natural dynamics zone): 5,117 ha / 50.9 % Development zone: 2,088 ha / 20.8 % Management zone: 2,857 ha / 28.4 % In this publication, the development zone and the management zone together correspond to the management zone.
Land ownership structure	Federal state: 95.8 % Municipalities: 4.2 %
Key habitats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Predominantly forest communities: coniferous forests, montane mixed forest, spruce plantations, <i>Bannwald</i> (protected forests) • Habitats Directive habitat types: dystrophic lakes, watercourses with floating aquatic vegetation, dry heaths, raised bogs, transition peatlands and quaking bogs • Habitats Directive habitat types: siliceous scree slopes, siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation, Luzulo-Fagetum beech forests, Asperulo-Fagetum beech forests, bog woodlands, acidophilous coniferous forests • <i>Grinden</i> (an almost treeless area of wet heathland), plateau bogs, corrie lakes, source area of the River Murg
Key species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitats Directive species: Jersey tiger, bullhead, green shield-moss, the moss species <i>Orthotrichum rogeri</i> • Birds: capercaillie, three-toed woodpecker, pygmy owl, black stork, meadow pipit, wryneck, citril finch • Insects: green mountain grasshopper, wart-biter bush cricket • Snakes: adder • Vegetation: sphagnum mosses, rare lichens, fungi, montane mixed forests and coniferous forests



Lower Oder Valley National Park

All data refer to the reference dates of the national park administration's self-assessment on 15 November 2023 and the on-site visit from 24–26 January 2024. Data may have changed by the time of the final editing of this publication.

Year of establishment and federal state	1995, Brandenburg
Size	10,418 ha
Administrative structure / organisational affiliation	The national park administration is organised as a state institution and is not an independent special regulatory authority with executive administrative powers. It is directly subordinate to the Ministry of Agriculture, Environment and Climate Protection (MLUK). The MLUK exercises both administrative and technical supervision. The Ministry is the highest nature conservation authority.
Zoning	Protection zone I (corresponds to the natural dynamics zone): 5,219.30 ha / 50.1 % Protection zone II (corresponds to the management zone): 5,198.70 ha / 49.9 %
Land ownership structure	Federal government: 8.08 % Federal state: 43.15 % Municipalities: 2.83 % Associations: 45.46 % Foundations: 0.04 % Private: 0.44 %
Key habitats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Floodplain with river, floodplain forests, floodplain water bodies, oxbows, wet meadows, and sedge fens • Near-natural forests • Dry grassland
Key species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Otter, beaver, red deer, white-tailed eagle, black tern, great bittern, spotted crane, golden oriole, lesser spotted woodpecker, thrush nightingale, corncrake, tadpole shrimp, white willow, snow parsley <i>Cnidium dubium</i>, acute sedge, reed • Wolf, black stork, eagle owl, black woodpecker, goldeneye, great capricorn beetle, tinder fungus, wild service tree, white elm and wych elm • Sand lizard, red-backed shrike, barred warbler, military orchid, three-toothed orchid, star gentian, feather grass



Western Pomerania Lagoon Area National Park

All data refer to the reference dates of the national park administration's self-assessment on 19 December 2022 and the on-site visit from 27–29 March 2023. Data may have changed by the time of the final editing of this publication.

Year of establishment and federal state	1990, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania
Size	78,655 ha
Administrative structure / organisational affiliation	The technical and administrative supervision of the national park administration lies with the State Ministry for the Environment (Ministry for Climate Protection, Agriculture, Rural Areas and Environment of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania), which is the highest nature conservation authority. The national park administration reports directly to this Ministry. It is an independent special authority within the Ministry's remit.
Zoning	<p>Protection zone I (core zone I): 13,577 ha (of which 4,387 ha terrestrial and 9,190 ha marine) / 17.3 %</p> <p>16 % of the core zone is subject to natural dynamics (natural dynamics zone). The remaining 1.3 % of the core zone is not free from use due to European legal obligations (Habitats Directive habitat types).</p> <p>Protection zone II (buffer and development zone II): 65,078 ha (of which 9,024 ha terrestrial and 56,054 ha marine) / 82.7 %</p> <p>Protection zone II, along with the portions of the core zone where limited use is allowed, make up the management zone.</p>
Land ownership structure	<p>Federal government: 86.05 %</p> <p>Federal state: 11.06 %</p> <p>Municipalities: 1.62 %</p> <p>Foundations: 0.22 %</p> <p>Church: 0.04 %</p> <p>Private: 2.25 %</p>
Key habitats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shallow waters and lagoons of the Baltic Sea • Beach • Dunes • Reedbeds • Forest • Wet meadows • Peatland • Dry grassland • Heathlands
Key species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crane, white-tailed eagle, little tern • Otter • Grey seal, harbour seal, harbour porpoise • Red deer



Hamburg Wadden Sea National Park

All data refer to the reference dates of the national park administration's self-assessment on 13 March 2024 and the on-site visit from 4–7 June 2024. Data may have changed by the time of the final editing of this publication.

Year of establishment and federal state	1990, Hamburg
Size	13,750 ha
Administrative structure / organisational affiliation	Administrative and technical supervision lies with the Authority for Environment, Climate, Energy and Agriculture (BUKEA), with such technical and administrative supervision exercised by the next higher hierarchical levels within BUKEA. BUKEA also acts as the highest nature conservation authority. The national park administration is part of BUKEA and is therefore not an independent special authority.
Zoning	Zone I (corresponding to the natural dynamics zone): 12,580 ha/91.5 % Zone II (corresponding to the management zone): 1,170 ha/8.5 %
Land ownership structure	Federal government: 90.38 % Federal state: 4.11 % Foundations: < 0.1 % Private: 0.15 %
Key habitats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tidal flats (including their mussel beds and tidal creek systems) • Permanently submerged shallow-water zones and sandbanks • Salt marshes • Beach • Dunes • Grassland
Key species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tidal flats: lugworm (<i>Arenicola marina</i>), blue mussel (<i>Mytilus edulis</i>), sand mason worm (<i>Lanice conchilega</i>), common cockle (<i>Cerastoderma edule</i>), sand gaper clam (<i>Mya arenaria</i>), Laver spire snail (<i>Hydrobia ulvae</i>), common shore crab (<i>Carcinus maenas</i>), brown shrimp (<i>Crangon crangon</i>), sand hopper (<i>Corophium volutator</i>), Pacific oyster (<i>Magallana gigas</i>), diatoms and dinoflagellates; fish species, including European plaice (<i>Pleuronectes platessa</i>), common sole (<i>Solea solea</i>), flounder (<i>Platichthys flesus</i>), sand goby (<i>Pomatoschistus minutus</i>), European smelt (<i>Osmerus eperlanus</i>), and sandeels (<i>Ammodytes</i> spp.) • Shallow-water zones: species also occurring in the tidal flats and tidal creeks, but here predominantly in a different assemblage than on the tidal flats. Intertidal sandbanks serve as resting and nursing sites primarily for harbour seal (<i>Phoca vitulina</i>) and grey seal (<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>) • Salt marshes: sea purslane (<i>Halimione portulacoides</i>), sea lavender (<i>Limonium</i> spp.), sea aster (<i>Aster tripolium</i>), annual sea-blite (<i>Suaeda maritima</i>), common saltmarsh grass (<i>Puccinellia maritima</i>), common cordgrass (<i>Spartina anglica</i>) • Beach: sea rocket (<i>Cakile maritima</i>), prickly saltwort (<i>Kali turgida</i>), sea sandwort (<i>Honckenya peploides</i>) • Dunes: marram grass (<i>Ammophila arenaria</i>), Sand rye grass (<i>Leymus arenarius</i>), sea pea (<i>Lathyrus japonicus</i>) • Grassland: smooth black sedge (<i>Carex nigra</i>), sneezewort (<i>Achillea ptarmica</i>), water foxtail (<i>Alopecurus geniculatus</i>), cuckooflower (<i>Cardamine pratensis</i>), meadow vetchling (<i>Lathyrus pratensis</i>), common starwort (<i>Stellaria graminea</i>)



Lower Saxon Wadden Sea National Park

All data refer to the reference dates of the national park administration's self-assessment on 4 March 2023 and the on-site visit from 7–9 June 2023. Data may have changed by the time of the final editing of this publication.

Year of establishment and federal state	1986, Lower Saxony
Size	345,497 ha
Administrative structure / organisational affiliation	Administrative and technical supervision of the national park administration lies with the Lower Saxony Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Climate Protection. The Ministry also acts as the highest nature conservation authority. The national park administration is directly subordinate to the Ministry and constitutes an independent special authority.
Zoning	<p>Zone I (restricted zone): 240,931 ha/69.73 %</p> <p>Zone II (intermediate zone): 102,694 ha/29.72 %</p> <p>Zone I and the predominant part of Zone II correspond in this publication to the natural dynamics zone (325,462 ha/94.2 %).</p> <p>Zone III (recreation zone): 1,872 ha/0.54 %</p> <p>The remaining part of Zone II, Zone III, as well as smaller portions of Zone I where dynamic development is not possible (e.g., groyne fields for coastal protection), are assigned to the management zone (20,035 ha/5.8 %).</p>
Land ownership structure	<p>Federal government: 82.8 %</p> <p>Federal state: 14.4 %</p> <p>Municipalities: 0.31 %</p> <p>Associations: 0.09 %</p> <p>Private: 0.11 %</p>
Key habitats	All coastal habitats with their characteristic species assemblages, including the often fine-scaled transitional areas, comprising the communities of the open water and coastal sea, those of the sandy and gravelly bottoms, channels and tidal creeks, the benthic communities of mud, sand, and mixed tidal flats shaped by the macrozoobenthos – particularly the blue mussel and oyster beds – as well as the beach, salt marshes and dunes with their specialised vegetation and breeding bird communities, and the migratory birds of the East Atlantic Flyway.
Key species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mammals: grey seal, harbour porpoise, and harbour seal • Fish: plaice, herring, eelpout, common goby, and whiting • Worms: lugworm, sand mason worm, and the marine polychaete • Bivalves: blue mussel (although many mussel beds are dominated by the introduced Pacific oyster), common cockle, and Baltic macoma • Crustaceans: common shore crab and brown shrimp • Breeding birds: oystercatcher, redshank, Sandwich tern, pied avocet, lesser black-backed gull, herring gull, eider, spoonbill, wheatear, meadow pipit, and skylark; for migratory birds, also dunlin, curlew, and rock pipit • Apex predators: marine mammals – harbour seal, grey seal, and harbour porpoise; birds – marsh harrier, hen harrier, short-eared owl, peregrine falcon, and white-tailed eagle; fish – sea trout and nursehound • Vegetation: dunes dominated by marram grass, salt marshes dominated by common saltmarsh grass, red fescue, and sand couch-grass <i>Elymus farctus</i>



Schleswig-Holstein Wadden Sea National Park

All data refer to the reference dates of the national park administration's self-assessment on 27 March 2024 and the on-site visit from 2–4 June 2024. Data may have changed by the time of the final editing of this publication.

Year of establishment and federal state	1985, Schleswig-Holstein
Size	438,005 ha
Administrative structure / organisational affiliation	The national park administration is directly subordinate to the Ministry for Energy Transition, Climate Protection, Environment and Nature of the State of Schleswig-Holstein. Administrative and technical supervision lies with the Ministry, which also acts as the highest nature conservation authority.
Zoning	Protection zone I: 158,000 ha / 35 % Protection zone II: 280,000 ha / 62 % The area of natural dynamics (32.18 % of the total area) lies within both protection zones I and II. It does not coincide exactly with protection zone I, as not all of zone I is free from fishing.
Land ownership structure	Federal state: 100 % National, association, and other private lands: a total of 93.58 ha / 0.02 %
Key habitats	Habitat types of the dunes, beaches, salt marshes, lagoons, tidal flats, large inlets and bays, sandbanks, and biogenic and geogenic reefs. All national park ecosystem types are fully assigned to individual Habitats Directive habitat types. A complete food web exists within the national park, from phytoplankton to apex predators.
Key species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key species influencing multiple ecosystem types: white-tailed eagle (<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>), peregrine falcon (<i>Falco peregrinus</i>), brent goose (<i>Branta bernicla</i>), barnacle goose (<i>Branta leucopsis</i>), wigeon (<i>Anas penelope</i>), sand mason worm (<i>Lanice conchilega</i>), blue mussel (<i>Mytilus edulis</i>), Pacific oyster (<i>Magallana gigas</i>) • Key species of the salt marsh ecosystem type: common tern (<i>Sterna hirundo</i>), Arctic tern (<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>), sandwich tern (<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>), glasswort (<i>Salicornia</i> spp.), common cordgrass (<i>Spartina anglica</i>), common saltmarsh grass (<i>Puccinellia maritima</i>), sea lavender (<i>Limonium vulgare</i>), sea aster (<i>Aster tripolium</i>), sea purslane (<i>Atriplex portulacoides</i>), sea couch-grass (<i>Elymus athericus</i>), red fescue (<i>Festuca rubra</i>) • Key species of the eulittoral ecosystem type: red knot (<i>Calidris canutus</i>), bar-tailed godwit (<i>Limosa lapponica</i>), lugworm (<i>Arenicola marina</i>), sand hopper (<i>Corophium volutator</i>), common eelgrass (<i>Zostera marina</i>), dwarf eelgrass (<i>Zostera noltii</i>), microalgae (e.g., <i>Navicula</i> spp.) • Key species of the sublittoral ecosystem type: harbour seal (<i>Phoca vitulina</i>), grey seal (<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>), harbour porpoise (<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>), Ross worm (<i>Sabellaria spinulosa</i>), sea moss (<i>Hydrallmania falcata</i> & <i>Sertularia cupressina</i>), Atlantic herring (<i>Clupea harengus</i>), lesser sand eel (<i>Ammodytes tobianus</i>), smelt (<i>Osmerus eperlanus</i>), gobies (<i>Pomatoschistus</i> spp.), zooplankton, phytoplankton • Key species of the dune ecosystem type: herring gull (<i>Larus argentatus</i>), lesser black-backed gull (<i>Larus fuscus</i>), sand couch-grass (<i>Elymus farctus</i>), marram grass (<i>Ammophila arenaria</i>), rugosa rose (<i>Rosa rugosa</i>)



5 Strengths and weaknesses of the German national parks and their underlying causes, analysed by activity areas

5.1 Activity area 1: Framework conditions

Activity area 1 comprises six quality criteria and the associated standards:

- 1) Legal foundations
- 2) Conservation purposes
- 3) Overriding planning principles
- 4) Responsibilities
- 5) Ownership rights
- 6) Boundaries and delineation

5.1.1 Legal foundations

Standard (target): The national park is legally secured by a national park act and/or a national park ordinance. State laws or regulations do not prevent the goals of the national park from being achieved. The national park is delimited in a legally correct manner.

Assessment: All national parks have a high level of protection under federal state law and are secured at the federal state level by a national park act or a national park ordinance. For transboundary national parks, there is additionally a treaty between the respective federal states.

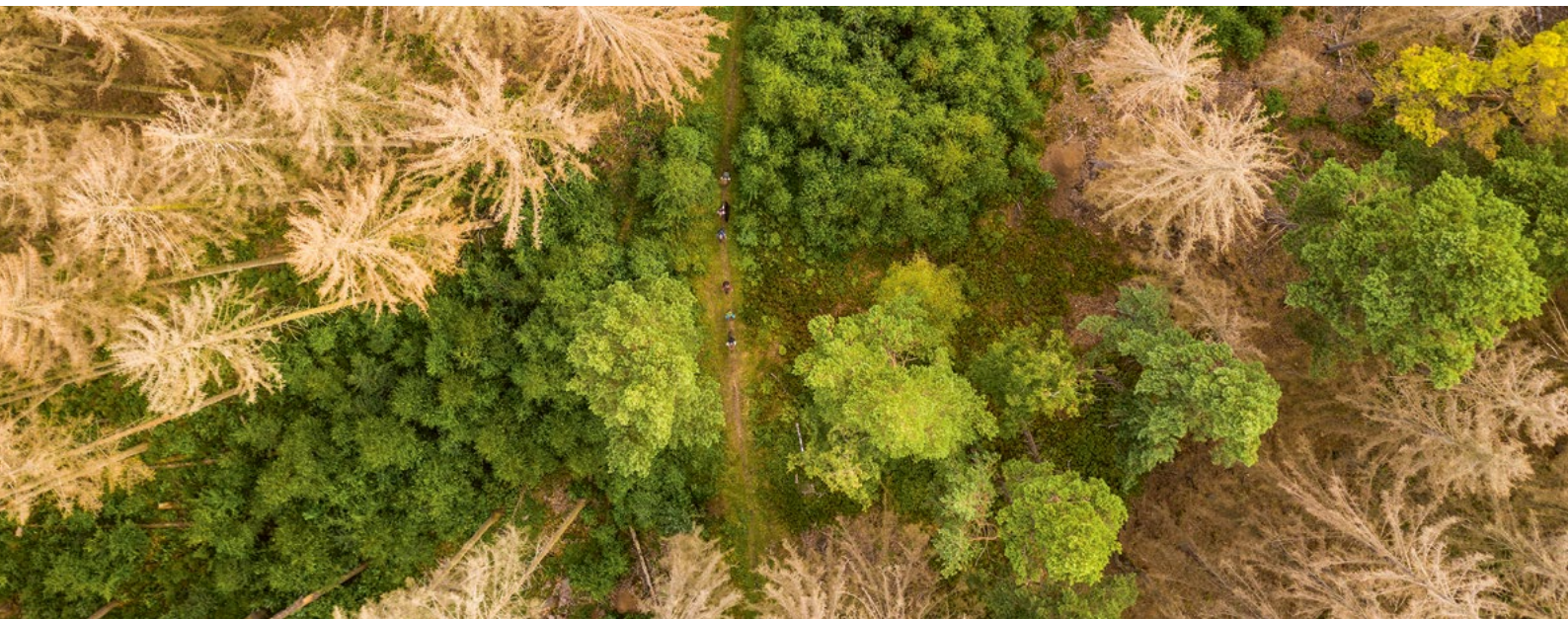
In certain national parks, legal provisions at the national and/or federal state level, and in two cases also international regulations and projects, conflict with the achievement of the objectives of the national park. Examples include traditional usage rights, water law permits, fishing rights, or regulations on coastal protection and inland waterway development.

Where the acts or ordinances establishing the national park are of older date, it is necessary in a few cases (when amending them) to also update the underlying maps in order to represent boundary lines more accurately. In just under a quarter of cases, the boundary maps need to be converted to current geodetic standards. Likewise, Natura 2000 requirements and the objectives of the national parks must be aligned. In one case, conflicts of objectives may arise in the natural dynamics zone between protection of natural processes and “static” Natura 2000 targets.

Other authorities with responsibilities within a national park take national park interests into account to varying degrees: in two national parks it is completely, in just over three quarters of the national parks it is on essential points, and in one case only partially.

Overall, the standard is largely met. However, in three quarters of the national parks there is a need for overarching legal adjustments where other laws or regulations may lead to conflicts of objectives. This mainly concerns existing usage rights.

Natural forest development following bark beetle infestation, Eifel National Park



5.1.2 Conservation purposes

Standard (target): The primary conservation purpose of the national park is to enable the undisturbed dynamics of natural processes in ecosystems, to restore them, and to ensure them in the long term. As far as the primary conservation purpose allows, the national park also serves the protection and management of species and habitats, as well as the further purposes of scientific environmental monitoring, nature, and wilderness education, as well as giving people the experience of nature.

Assessment: The conservation purpose of undisturbed natural process dynamics is sufficiently described in all national parks. However, in more than half of the national parks acts or ordinances, the priority of the primary conservation purpose of “allowing natural dynamic processes” is not clearly emphasised over other goals, such as species and habitat protection, maintenance and regeneration, or regional development. Where the legal basis (see Chapter 5.1.1) allows exceptions (in particular, additional uses), this subsequently also affects the conservation purpose and its implementation.

5.1.3 Overriding planning principles

Standard (target): The national park’s demarcation and conservation purpose are taken into account in the regional and state-wide spatial plans relevant to it, or the spatial plan for the exclusive economic zone (EEZ), in such a way that the entire national park area is defined as a “priority area for nature conservation”.

Assessment: In almost all national parks, the standard is met. Only one national park is not anchored in the regional plan as a “priority area for nature conservation.”

Because no designation exists for a national park region beyond the park itself, in two cases the authority of the national park administration remains largely limited to the park area. In particular, the ability to influence neighbouring large-scale projects with potentially significant impacts on the national park is therefore limited. In one national park, exceptions for infrastructure measures in a federal state development plan affect the achievement of its conservation purpose.

5.1.4 Responsibilities

Standard (target): The national park administration has all the official authorisation needed for implementation of the conservation purposes, especially as a nature conservation, forestry, hunting, fisheries, and water authority. Where other bodies have responsibilities in the national park, they respect the objectives and interests of the national park in their decision-making and involve the national park administration.

Assessment: The standard is largely met. With the exception of one national park administration, all hold responsibility as the lower nature conservation authority, and three quarters also as the regulatory authority. Nearly all forest national park administrations also serve as forestry and hunting authorities, and one national park administration also functions as a fisheries authority.

Nevertheless, in all but two national parks, the delegation of additional official competences to the national park administrations is necessary for them to carry out their tasks effectively.

In only one national park does the administration currently have no enforcement competences necessary for achieving the conservation purposes due to a lack of official responsibilities.

Other authorities operating within the national park take its interests into account on essential points.

5.1.5 Ownership rights

Standard (target): The area of the national park is completely owned by bodies and stakeholders (preferably the federal state) who permanently and lawfully support the goals of the national park, or who do not conflict with them. Where this is not the case, permanent provisions are in place to ensure that the national park goals are achieved.

Assessment: The standard is largely met. The vast majority of national park areas are publicly owned, in particular by the respective federal state. In just under half of the national parks, no weaknesses in this regard are evident. In only one national park is less than 50% of the area publicly owned. Above all in four national parks, a relatively large proportion of the area is owned by the federal government; in a few cases and to a limited extent, municipalities, associations, and private individuals also hold ownership. In these cases, the risk of conflicts and the need for coordination are higher than on state-owned land.

5.1.6 Boundaries and delineation

Standard (target): The national park is designated as a compact and coherent area, taking into account ecosystem criteria. The national park is free of settlements and transport infrastructure and therefore not fragmented. The national park covers at least 10,000 ha. Exceptionally, a smaller area of outstanding international importance can be designated as a national park. In such a case, the area is delimited in such a way that the fulfilment of the primary conservation purpose is ensured.

Assessment: With regard to size, all national parks meet the standard. They either cover at least 10,000 ha (four national parks considerably more) or the national park is of outstanding international importance. One national park was expanded in 2020, and for three national parks there are short- to medium-term options for expansion, in one

case by more than 1,000 ha. These expansions are intended to help achieve the minimum size, reduce influences from outside the national park, create larger unfragmented areas, increase the area of the natural dynamics zone, or connect previously separate parts of the national park. In six national parks, small settlement areas are located within the natural dynamics zone, while in other national parks such areas are excluded from the park area. Just under half of the national parks exhibit high degrees of fragmentation or access due to transport infrastructure – particularly service roads. Three national parks each consist of two separate areas, with both separate areas exceeding 10,000 ha in one case. In two cases, the shape of the area results in an unfavourable degree of rounding, with influences from outside the national park disproportionately high relative to the total area.

5.1.7 Strengths and weaknesses

The following overview summarises in bullet points the strengths and weaknesses of the national parks in the activity area “Framework conditions”.

Strengths	Weaknesses
All national parks are legally secured and sufficiently delimited in a legally correct manner.	In three quarters of the national parks, other legal foundations may lead to conflicts with the conservation purposes of the national park.
The primary conservation purpose of undisturbed dynamics of natural processes is adequately described in all national park acts or national park ordinances.	Nevertheless, in more than half of the legal foundations, the priority of the primary conservation purpose – “natural dynamics” – over other goals is not sufficiently emphasised.
Almost all national parks are designated in federal state or regional plans as “priority areas for nature conservation.”	One national park administration lacks all official responsibilities necessary to achieve the conservation purposes of the national park, and almost all others lack certain individual responsibilities.
Almost all national park administrations hold responsibility as the lower nature conservation authority.	Two national parks consist of two separate areas, neither of which reaches the minimum size of 10,000 ha.
The vast majority of national park areas are publicly owned, with most of this land belonging to the federal state.	Two national parks are affected by influences from the vicinity of the national park due to an unfavourable spatial configuration.
Three quarters of the national parks have an area of at least 10,000 ha, and in some cases, this is significantly exceeded. A few national parks do not reach this size but are of outstanding international importance or are linked in a transboundary network with national parks in neighbouring states.	Just under half of the national parks show high degrees of fragmentation and access issues, and in six national parks, small settlement areas are located within the natural dynamics zone.



Forest national parks provide ideal habitats for species associated with them through near-natural forest development and the presence of standing and fallen deadwood, such as the false blister beetle *Ditylus laevis*. This rare species is a primeval forest relict species, and its only current known locality in Germany is in the Bavarian Forest National Park.

5.1.8 Comparison

In the activity area “Framework conditions,” the situation has remained largely unchanged since the first evaluation from 2009 to 2012.

It is particularly noteworthy that in the Wadden Sea National Parks, with the adoption of the North Sea Navigation Ordinance and the concentration of energy transmission lines, the specific interests of the national parks are better protected. One national park has succeeded in expanding its area by a

further 1,950 ha, thereby approaching the standard value of 10,000 ha. In another case, preparations for closing the gap between two separate areas are very advanced.

A specific threat to the fundamental conservation objectives arises in one national park from an international inland waterways agreement concluded in 2015, as a result of which significant changes to the ongoing dynamics of natural processes are to be expected.

5.1.9 Key recommendations for action

- (In the case of) revision/amendment of the national park act or national park ordinance:
 - a) clearer emphasis on the primary conservation purpose of “natural dynamics,”
 - b) removal of exceptions for uses that conflict with the primary and other conservation purposes,
 - c) integration of the Natura 2000 requirements relevant to the national park
- In the Wadden Sea National Parks: strengthen the enforcement of the North Sea Navigation Ordinance
- Where not yet done and technically necessary, transfer of essential official responsibilities (particularly those of the lower nature conservation authority) to the national park administration
- Consistent continuation of efforts to reduce fragmentation and to thin out the network of paths
- Continuation or intensification of efforts to consolidate and expand the national park through purchase or exchange, particularly of privately owned areas, both within and in the immediate vicinity of the national park

5.2 Activity area 2: Organisation

Activity area 2 comprises seven quality criteria and the associated standards:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1) Administrative function, tasks, and staffing of the national park administration | 4) Volunteer management |
| 2) Personnel management | 5) Environmental management and sustainable procurement |
| 3) Ranger service | 6) Financing |
| | 7) Advisory boards and boards of trustees |

5.2.1 Administrative function, tasks, and staffing of the national park administration

Standard (target): The national park administration is directly responsible to the highest nature conservation authority. It is an independent special authority. The national park administration performs all tasks necessary to safeguard and promote the conservation purposes. In addition, within the meaning of the Federal Nature Conservation Act (BNatSchG) and the state nature conservation acts (LNatSchG), it carries out or coordinates tasks to achieve other national park purposes, in particular scientific environmental monitoring, nature and wilderness education, as well as giving people the experience of nature. Fulfilment of the tasks is ensured by sufficient staffing. This applies to both the number of permanent positions as well as to the qualifications and competences of the staff in order to fulfil their tasks.

Assessment: The organisational structure of national park administrations varies widely. Fourteen national park administrations are either directly responsible to the state ministry for the environment as the highest nature conservation authority or are themselves part of it. Two national park administrations are part of a federal state-owned enterprise. Eleven national park administrations operate as independent special authorities; in two of these cases, a single special authority is responsible for both national parks.

Cross-state national parks constitute special cases: in one case, the national park administration is organisationally responsible to only one of the two federal state environment ministries, while in the other case it is responsible to the ministries of both federal states. In none of the national parks is the complete fulfilment of the tasks ensured by adequate staffing; however, the extent of the shortfall varies, ranging from minor deficits in about a quarter of the national parks to four national parks in which staffing must be described as wholly inadequate. The majority of national park administrations are able to fulfil their tasks well with the existing staff. The deficits described are most evident primarily in the core tasks of education, research, and the ranger service. It is particularly noteworthy that in all national park administrations the existing staff are well to very well qualified and highly motivated.

5.2.2 Personnel management

Standard (target): There is a clear job and task description for all positions. This enables employees to act independently, be involved in decision-making processes and internal communication, and to receive opportunities for regular training that they can take advantage of. The national park administration is responsible for recruiting personnel.

Assessment: In all national parks, clear task descriptions exist for all or at least most positions. In all national parks, there is good internal communication, and staff are involved through various instruments to the extent possible; needs for improvement arise mainly from the fact that information and communication requirements vary considerably by area of responsibility within all national parks – for example, between staff working primarily in the field (ranger service) and those working mainly in the office (administration).

More than half of the national park administrations do not have a staff development concept (SDC). In some cases, the existing personnel development concepts do not apply specifically to the national park itself but rather to the entire portfolio of the responsible ministry. As a result, the interests of the respective national park are not always adequately taken into account. All national park administrations have at least some degree of say in personnel selection; the extent of this varies and depends, among other factors, on the organisational structure. In most national parks, affiliation with the state administration provides access to internal, often subsidised training and professional development opportunities. Nevertheless, in just under half of the national park administrations, the training budget is too small relative to staffing levels.

5.2.3 Ranger service

Standard (target): Rangers are responsible in particular for patrolling (monitoring compliance with protection regulations), data collection (monitoring), visitor management, visitor care, and environmental education, as well as for technical jobs on site. To enable this, a sufficient number of suitably qualified full-time permanent staff is available in the national park administration. The national park authority enables a uniform appearance of the rangers. People employed for the mandatory monitoring of the protection regulations have undergone training that meets contemporary requirements.

Assessment: Rangers are the “face” of the national parks on the ground. While the essential tasks of the rangers can be addressed to some extent in all national parks, in three quarters of the national parks staffing levels are insufficient to cover even the priority tasks satisfactorily.

In particular, patrolling, a core component of the ranger’s responsibilities (see figure), suffers from inadequate personnel, especially since almost all national parks are located in heavily visited tourist regions. In some national parks, rangers are supported in educational activities by volunteers.

In just under half of the national parks, the national park administration ensures a uniform appearance of the ranger service through the wearing of official uniforms.

The level of training and qualifications of rangers is inconsistent due to the absence of nationwide standards. Classification also varies within pay grades E5 to E8, which, in the context of the skills shortage, makes it difficult to recruit personnel in the national parks with lower pay. Overall, however, just over half of the national parks have very well to above-average qualified permanent staff in the ranger service.

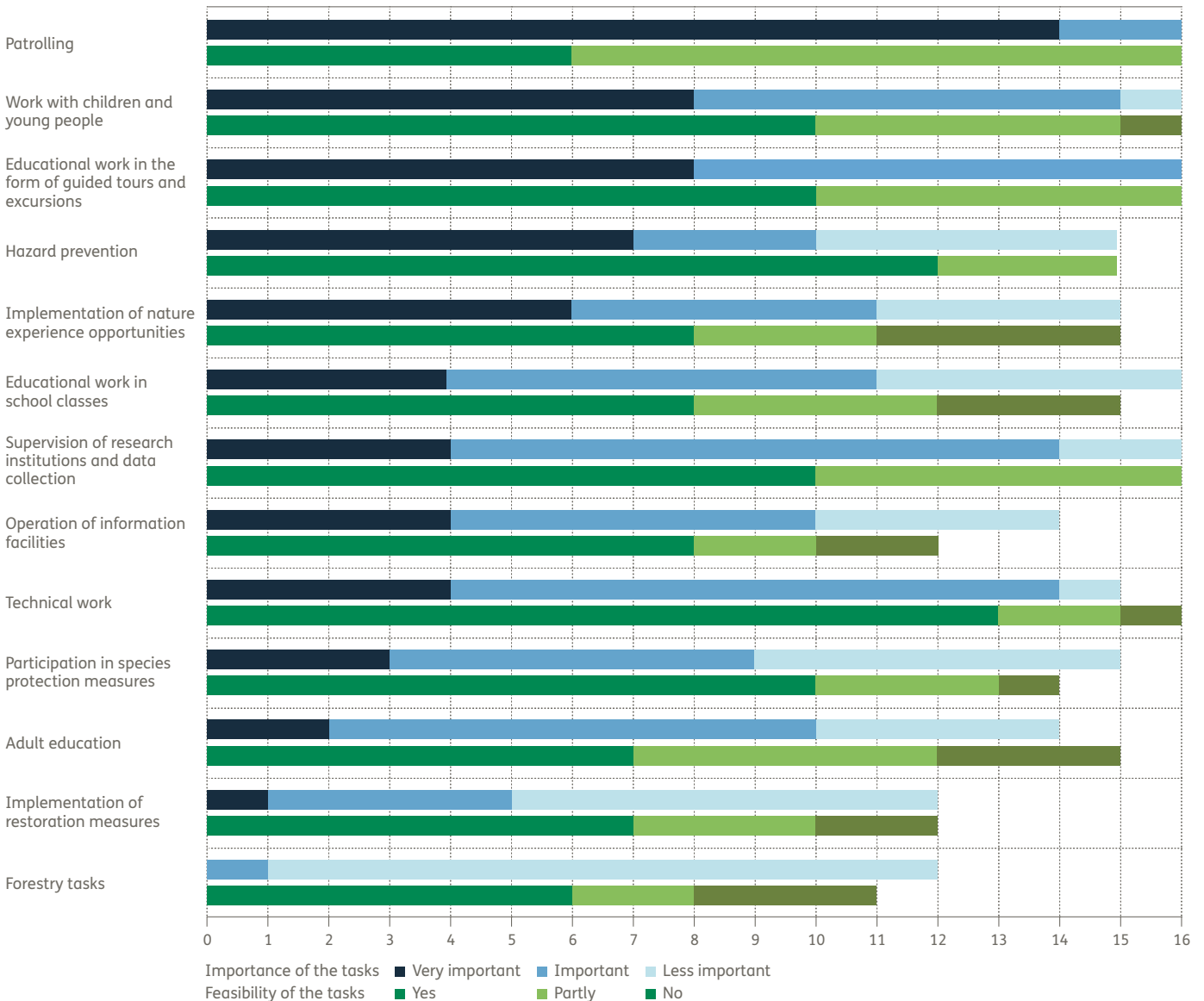


Figure 3: Range of tasks for professional rangers working in the national parks, and importance and feasibility of these tasks

5.2.4 Volunteer management

Standard (target): The national park administration offers volunteers the opportunity to work in the national park, for example in educational and public relations work, patrolling, or in monitoring and research. The volunteers are recruited by the national park administration as part of coordinated volunteer management; they are qualified and looked after by full-time staff, and they have the opportunity to take part in further training. The capacity and competence required for qualified supervision of volunteers are taken into account in staffing levels and personnel development.

Assessment: In all national parks, volunteers support the national park administrations in various areas of responsibility; in around a quarter of the national parks this is also because staffing in the ranger service and education sectors is insufficient. Volunteers receive specific briefings before their assignment, further training, and supervision during their work – although the extent of this varies depending on the capacities of the national park administration. As a result, approximately half of the national parks have comprehensive volunteer management programmes with staff dedicated to coordination, while in four national parks there is no central position for comprehensive and systematic volunteer management.

5.2.5 Environmental management and sustainable procurement

Standard (target): The national park administration acts as a role model for environmentally friendly action in all of its areas of responsibility. It ensures this by focusing on the lowest possible consumption and through environmental compatibility in property management, energy supply and consumption, as well as in procurement. Energy supply and consumption, resource management and emissions are recorded in an audit. The national park administration actively informs the general public about the experience they have gained and possibilities for taking action.

Nevertheless, relevant environmental data are collected at various levels in all national parks, and the majority conduct regular audits. One national park is EMAS-certified. Sustainable procurement generally takes place to the extent possible in all national parks; however, the central coordinating bodies are not always the national park administrations, but rather the state authorities or service providers responsible for procurement. In just under half of the national parks, staff are intensively involved in collecting environmental data; the same applies to external communication of these efforts.

Assessment: Environmental management and sustainable procurement play a subordinate role in 15 of the 16 national parks, because comprehensive engagement with these topics (such as the implementation of environmental management systems or increasing energy efficiency in the building stock) requires relatively high personnel input and is costly.

5.2.6 Financing

Standard (target): The individual federal state ensures sufficient funding for the national park administration. In addition to personnel costs, this includes sufficiently high operating and financial resources for the permanent and high-quality fulfilment of all national park administration tasks and measures. The budget items are reciprocally coverable. The national park administration can manage its budget independently. In addition, the administration can raise funding, as far as its staffing allows.

Assessment: Financial resources are generally adequate in twelve national parks; however, in four of these national parks there are still deficits in staffing, and in six national parks there are substantial limitations, such as outdated infrastructure or infrastructure requiring renovation (buildings, transport routes, IT infrastructure). In four national parks, funding is fundamentally insufficient: two of these rely on donations to finance regular operations. Flexibility in the use of funds, for example through the free movement in the coverability of individual budget items, exists in just under half of the national parks. External funding on a larger scale is secured in just under half of the national parks; further potential cannot be fully exploited everywhere, as obtaining such funding requires adequate baseline resources.

5.2.7 Advisory boards and boards of trustees

Standard (target): Advisory boards, boards of trustees, and other consultative bodies promote national park development and support the integration of the national park into the region.

Assessment: In almost all national parks, there are bodies that provide technical and/or political advice and support to the national park administrations. With a few exceptions, cooperation with these bodies is constructive and based on trust, which also has a positive impact on the region.

In just under half of the national parks, there is no scientific advisory or research board.

Patrolling by the national park ranger service,
Saxon Switzerland National Park



5.2.8 Strengths and weaknesses

The following overview summarises in bullet points the strengths and weaknesses of the national parks in the activity area “Organisation”.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Almost all national parks are directly subordinate to the highest nature conservation authority (ministry) or are themselves part of it.	The full performance of all tasks is not ensured in any national parks due to insufficient staffing. Deficits exist primarily in education, research, and the ranger service.
The national park administrations can act largely independently (independent special authority).	Due to the lack of nationwide standards for the ranger profession, the level of training and qualifications is inconsistent, and staff are therefore classified at different pay grades, which are often too low.
The majority of national park administrations are able to fulfil their tasks well with the existing staffing levels.	More than half of the national park administrations lack a personnel development concept.
All national park administrations have a good level of training and qualifications (including in the ranger service), and staff show high intrinsic motivation.	In almost all national parks, environmental management and sustainable procurement play a rather subordinate role.
In all national parks, volunteers support the work of the national park administrations.	In four national parks, the financial resources are considered critical, in two of these fundamentally insufficient to cover the core tasks. In just under half of the national parks, there are significant cost risks due to renovation backlogs, for example in infrastructure.
In all national parks, relevant environmental data for environmental management and sustainable procurement are collected at various levels.	In just over a quarter of the national parks, the potential for external funding, particularly for research, is (still) not being sufficiently utilised.
Just under three quarters of the national parks have sufficient financial resources to fulfil their core tasks.	In just under half of the national parks, there is no scientific advisory or research board.
All national park administrations raise external funding – partly with the support of cooperation partners.	
Almost all national park administrations receive policy advice and/or technical support from boards or committees.	

5.2.9 Comparison

In the activity area “Organisation,” there have been slight improvements in the majority of national parks since the first evaluation in 2009–2012. This particularly concerns organisational structures as independent special authorities, adjustments in staffing levels, and the structures of volunteer management. However, the overall slightly positive picture should not obscure the fact that a quarter of the national parks are operating at minimal financial levels, and in almost half of the national parks, patrolling – a core task of a national park – remains at an insufficient level.

Fundamentally, all national parks have high potential in the areas of nature conservation (and thus in achieving national and international biodiversity targets), research, education, as well as recreational and leisure use as a contribution to regional value creation. These potentials are utilised with varying intensity, with a direct correlation to financial and staffing levels. Against the backdrop of an increasing skills shortage, it should be emphasised that aspects of personnel development, as an important factor in recruiting and retaining skilled staff, continue to receive only subordinate consideration in almost all national park administrations. Further deficits are looming in the ranger service due to the skills shortage.

5.2.10 Key recommendations for action

- Establish the national park administration as a special authority where this has not yet been done
- Improve staffing levels: a) generally, b) specifically in the areas of patrolling, research and monitoring, public outreach/ communication, and environmental education, c) in the ranger service
- Prepare personnel development concepts where none exist
- Increase the budget for staff training and professional development
- Ongoing training of rangers, in particular specialised training for engaging with international visitors
- Establish a position for the central coordination of volunteer deployment
- Record various relevant parameters of environmental and sustainability management in an audit
- Improve the national park administration's sustainable procurement and environmental management, as well as internal and external communication on these matters
- Increase financial resources
- Introduce a budgeting system as a tool for flexible financial management
- Establish and legally anchor a research or scientific advisory board

Volunteers support national park administrations in many ways, as shown here during the repair and construction of seating in Hainich National Park



5.3 Activity area 3: Protection of natural biodiversity and dynamics

Action Area 3 comprises four quality criteria and the associated standards:

- 1) Space for natural dynamics
- 2) Zoning
- 3) Habitats of international importance
- 4) Ecosystem connectivity

5.3.1 Space for natural dynamics

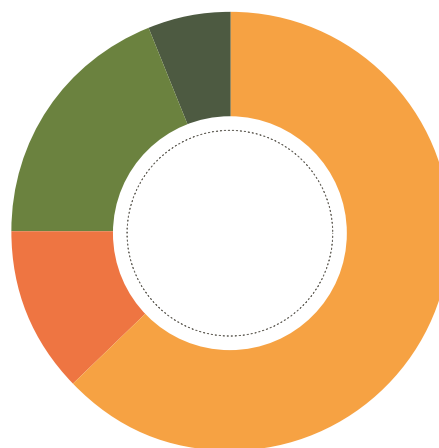
Standard (target): The national park protects natural dynamics and the undisturbed course of natural processes in the ecosystems it represents. This is ensured within 30 years of the national park being designated and on at least 75 % of its area. If this is not possible, specific strategies and measures to achieve this goal as quickly as possible should be clearly visible. National parks with more than 40 % of their area not in public ownership, or which completely encompass a habitat of global importance in Germany, can set longer time limits in the national park plan, or must at least protect large areas of representative habitats in their natural processes over most of its area. In the event of substantial expansions of the national park, a further transition period of 30 years will apply for the new area. The areas to protect the natural dynamics (natural dynamics zone) are contiguous, unfragmented, and compact; the length of their outer boundaries in relation to their area should be as short as possible.

Assessment: Of the eleven exclusively terrestrial national parks, more than half protect natural dynamics and the undisturbed course of natural processes on at least 75 % of their area. Two national parks had nearly achieved this goal at the time of evaluation. Two national parks already allow more than 90 % of their area to develop naturally. Despite having been established only about ten years ago, two national parks have already designated substantial areas as natural dynamics zones. Only one national park remains far from the target formulated in the standard, even almost 30 years after its establishment. This is primarily due to complex ownership structures.

The situation is different in the five national parks that also include marine areas. While about two thirds of these parks also protect the undisturbed course of natural processes on at least 75 % of their terrestrial area, in another national park this target is nearly met. In the marine areas, however, this goal has so far not been achieved, primarily due to ongoing fishing activities, although the intensity of use varies between the national parks.

Despite the high proportion of areas with natural dynamics in the terrestrial zone, the course of natural processes is hindered in all national parks by various factors and influences. In almost half of the national parks, the natural dynamics zone consists either of non-contiguous subareas and/or is fragmented by transport routes or fences. The exercise of existing use rights by third parties or management interventions by the national park administration also occur in the natural dynamics zone in almost all national parks (see figure). The latter particularly concerns ungulate population management, which takes place in the natural dynamics zone in half of the national parks. In two further national parks, predator management is carried out in favour of target species. However, more than half of the national parks have further increased the proportion of areas without hunting.

A lasting impairment of natural dynamics is a risk in two national parks due to the expansion of international shipping routes. Although these projects are to be implemented outside the national parks, they are negatively affected by edge effects and associated inputs.



■ 0 % of the natural dynamics zone
 ■ 1-10 % of the natural dynamics zone
 ■ 11-20 % of the natural dynamics zone
 ■ over 20 % of the natural dynamics zone

Figure 4: Impairment of the natural dynamics zone due to exceptions for wildlife management and material use (n = 16)



Restricted zone, Lower Saxon Wadden Sea National Park

5.3.2 Zoning

Standard (target): The national park is clearly divided by zoning into areas in which natural dynamics are already taking place and areas in which management measures can be carried out temporarily or permanently. The zoning of the national park is part of the national park act and/or the national park ordinance, as well as the national park plan, and is publicly accessible.

Assessment: This standard is fully or largely met by almost three quarters of the national parks. In all national parks, zoning is part of the legal framework and/or national park plan. However, in more than a quarter of the national parks, the zoning recorded there (often outdated) does not correspond to actual current zoning relevant for on-the-ground management. As a result, the areas where natural dynamics are already taking place are not always legally defined and are not always publicly accessible. In about a quarter of the national parks, designation of the zones is also unclear.

5.3.3 Habitats of international importance

Standard (target): The national park contains habitats of international importance. These are sufficiently recorded and, including the necessary protection and conservation measures, are shown in the national park plan.

Assessment: All national parks contain species and/or habitats of international importance. Together, the national parks cover almost the entire range of Habitats Directive habitat types found in Germany, with several national parks containing more than 20 Habitats Directive habitat types. A quarter of the national parks are part of the UNESCO World Natural Heritage site “Beech Forests,” and three are part of the UNESCO World Natural Heritage site “Wadden Sea”. Six national parks are (partly) Ramsar sites, providing valuable breeding and resting habitats for various bird species of international importance. A quarter of the national parks are also a UNESCO biosphere reserve or part of one.

Where management of individual internationally important open habitats is necessary, this is carried out while allowing natural dynamics to the greatest extent possible and in accordance with the national park primary objective of dynamic natural development; it is also locally accompanied by intensive monitoring and, in some cases, based on corresponding individual plans. In certain national parks, greater involvement of the immediate vicinity of the national park is needed for the protection of open habitats.

In half of the national parks, the internationally important habitats and the necessary protection and conservation measures are presented in the national park plan; in these cases, the standard is met. A quarter of the national parks show minor gaps in data collection, while another quarter still has deficits. These concern the recording of habitats of international importance as well as missing, outdated, or insufficient management statements – for example, because the Natura 2000 management plan is not part of the national park plan. In some national parks, corresponding revisions are already underway.

5.3.4 Ecosystem connectivity

Standard (target): Via ecologically effective areas and corridors, the national park is connected with areas outside its borders that are important for the protection of habitats and species. Such functional connections exist in particular with areas in the national park region or in the immediate vicinity, and extend spatially as far as possible. In particular, connections are present with nature reserves, with areas and nationally important axes and corridors of the federal biotope network, as well as to sites in the Natura 2000 network. In order to achieve this, or to guarantee it permanently, the national park is included in regional, as well as federal state and nationwide biotope network and similar plans.

Assessment: All national park have biotope connectivity structures and surrounding additional protected areas, in some cases in high numbers. The Wadden Sea National Parks form a contiguous trilateral protected area with the Wadden Sea in the Netherlands and Denmark, including ecologically effective corridors. Three further national parks cooperate with protected areas in neighbouring countries (national park, nature park). In two additional national parks, there is potential for a cross-border national park, which is currently not being pursued, so that overall, six national parks have the possibility of forming an international park.

The standard is fully met by only three national parks; the remaining national parks meet it only partially. There are both positive and negative developments among them. In some national parks, supra-regional connectivity for certain species and habitats – such as the wildcat – is implemented in an exemplary manner, but overall, it remains an area for improvement across all national parks. This applies particularly to wide-ranging species such as lynx, red deer, capercaillie, and fish species, to the connectivity of floodplain habitats to better maintain natural flooding dynamics, and to the connection of marine national parks with adjacent marine protected areas or inland habitats. In three quarters of the national parks, connectivity deficits are attributable to the slow implementation of existing concepts; in one national park, they are due to isolation and small size, and in another to the absence of a concept for ecosystem connectivity.

These issues are often caused by insufficient personnel or financial resources. Another reason is that in a quarter of the national parks, the ability of the national park administration to influence connectivity projects in the immediate vicinity of the national park is limited, or the national park administration is not actively involved in regional and statewide connectivity concepts. In addition, in at least six national parks, ecosystem connectivity is currently threatened by factors such as wind energy plans, road construction, loss of open areas, river development projects, or protective fences implemented to combat African swine fever. In a few national parks, connectivity has already been severely affected by measures within the national park itself.

5.3.5 Strengths and weaknesses

The following overview summarises in bullet points the strengths and weaknesses of the national parks in the activity area “Protection of natural biodiversity and dynamics”.

Strengths	Weaknesses
More than half of the national parks protect natural dynamics and the undisturbed course of natural processes on at least 75 % of their terrestrial area.	In the marine areas of the national parks, natural dynamics are still largely impaired, mainly due to fishing activities, so that the 75 % target is not achieved overall.
Almost all national parks for which this is not yet the case are on a good path to achieve the 75 % target, at least in their terrestrial part, before the end of the 30-year period.	In more than half of the national parks, over 20% of the natural dynamics zone is affected by material use or exceptions for wildlife management.
Almost three quarters of all national parks have a clear and legally binding zoning into areas with and without natural dynamics, which is publicly accessible.	In almost half of the national parks, the natural dynamics zone is fragmented and/or intersected by transport routes or fences.
All national parks contain species and/or habitats of international importance.	In just over a quarter of the national parks, the official zoning does not reflect the actual situation, and designation of the zones is partly inconsistent and unclear.
All national parks have structures for ecosystem connectivity and surrounding protected areas. Some national parks implement connectivity concepts for individual species in an exemplary manner.	Regional and supra-regional ecosystem connectivity of the national parks still has room for improvement everywhere.
The three Wadden Sea National Parks form a contiguous trilateral protected area. In six further national parks along international borders, there is cross-border cooperation with adjacent protected areas and the potential to establish a transboundary national park.	In three quarters of the national parks, existing concepts for ecosystem connectivity are implemented only slowly, often due to insufficient personnel and financial resources.
	A quarter of the national parks are insufficiently or not at all integrated into supra-regional connectivity planning. In at least six national parks, there are plans in the immediate vicinity of the national park that threaten ecosystem connectivity.

5.3.6 Comparison

In the activity area “Protection of natural biological diversity and dynamics”, there have been significant improvements in the vast majority of the national parks since the first evaluation from 2009 to 2012. This particularly concerns the core task of national parks: enabling the undisturbed course of natural processes on at least three quarters of their area. Although this target has not yet been achieved in all national parks, almost all of them have nevertheless made clear progress in some respects. However, this applies only to terrestrial areas. In the marine zone, it remains very difficult to leave large areas exclusively to natural dynamics due to existing uses. Even in terrestrial areas, restrictions still exist due to exceptions, such as for wildlife management or due to fragmentation. While the expansion of areas without hunting has progressed in the majority of the national parks, reducing fragmentation remains difficult and slow overall, despite positive developments in some national parks.

In one case, fragmentation of the natural dynamics area has even increased significantly. Additionally, there are cases in which natural dynamics and ecosystem connectivity with the immediate vicinity of the national parks are threatened by planning and infrastructure projects, either within the management zones or in the immediate vicinity of the national parks. In some instances, this represents a deterioration compared with the previous evaluation.

Even at the time of the last evaluation, about half of the national parks had clear and legally secured zoning. Progress has since been made in three further national parks, leading to the fulfilment of the standard. Gaps in the representation of internationally important habitats in the national park plan have been closed, though not yet completely. In terms of ecosystem connectivity, there are both positive and negative developments among the national parks.

5.3.7 Key recommendations for action

- Consistent transfer of areas into the natural dynamics zone to achieve the 75 % target no later than 30 years after the designation of the respective national park, or to reach it as quickly as possible thereafter
- Minimisation of fragmentation of the natural dynamics zone
- Reduction of material use, particularly fishing and crab fishing
- Reduction of exceptions for regulatory management interventions, especially for wildlife management
- Clear and legally binding definition of zoning according to the actual management of the area, distinguishing areas of natural dynamics, temporary management, and permanent management
- Prompt publication of current zoning
- Recording of any remaining species and habitats of international importance, and development of a corresponding management concept
- Expansion of ecosystem connectivity structures, including support for international protected area designations in national parks along national borders

Coral tooth fungus, a species growing on deadwood in Serrahn primeval beech forest, Müritz National Park – part of the UNESCO World Natural Heritage “Beech Forests”.



5.4 Activity area 4: Management

Activity area 4 comprises eight quality criteria and the associated standards:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1) National park vision | 5) Regulations on usage |
| 2) National park plan | 6) Visitor guidance |
| 3) Restoration | 7) Patrolling |
| 4) Species and habitat management | 8) Monitoring the success of measures |

5.4.1 National park vision

Standard (target): The national park has a vision for its development. The vision is fundamental, long term, visionary, and compatible with the overarching vision for German national parks from EUROPARC Germany (2005). The vision is part of the national park plan.

Assessment: All national parks have a vision that forms part of the national park plans and fully or largely meets the requirements. Only in four national parks is it either not up to date or not sufficiently aligned with the primary conservation purpose of “letting nature be nature.”

5.4.2 National park plan

Standard (target): The national park plan is ready no later than five years after national park designation and is updated regularly, at least every ten years. It guides and determines the activities in the national park carried out by the national park administration and the other responsible administrative authorities. Regional stakeholders are given suitable opportunities to participate in the development and updating of the national park plan. The national park plan is based on the German “Leitfaden zur Erarbeitung von Nationalpark-Plänen” (EUROPARC Deutschland, 2000, in English “Guideline for the Preparation of National Park Plans”) and the “Vorschläge zur Gliederung und zu Inhalten von Nationalpark-Plänen” (BfN-Skripten 425, 2015, in English “Suggestions for the Structure and Content of National Park Plans”). It names clear goals as well as time horizons and measures, as well as indicators for their achievement to enable evaluation of the achievement of goals.

Assessment: All national parks have national park plans that address key aspects of management. However, they vary in how up to date and comprehensive they are. In a quarter of cases, they are wholly or partially outdated; in some instances, the need for revision has existed for more than ten years. For half of the national parks, the plans are incomplete in terms of content or spatial coverage and do not address relevant management fields, for example species management, monitoring the success of measures, or projects and measures, or do so only inadequately or only for parts of the area. Two national park plans are insufficiently transparent or have not been fully published. The shortcomings are, as a rule, attributable to the limited staff capacities of the national park administrations. No weaknesses were identified in three national parks.

5.4.3 Restoration

Standard (target): Restoration measures are limited to deconstruction of structures and initiating measures on areas outside the natural dynamics zone that have been altered by anthropogenic intervention before national park designation in such a way that natural self-regulation can hardly be expected, even in the long term, without restoration.

Assessment: Restoration measures are carried out in all national parks and, as a rule, take the form of temporary initiating measures. The main focus is usually on the revitalisation of watercourses and peatlands, the removal of path infrastructure, and the promotion of near-natural forest communities. In well over half of the national parks, there remains a substantial need for restoration, often also within the natural dynamics zone, even in cases where the national parks have existed for several decades. A quarter of the national parks have been advised to accelerate the removal of paths. Six national parks exhibit no significant weaknesses.

5.4.4 Species and habitat management

Standard (target): Species management measures are presented and justified in the national park plan. Active management of species in the national park is of secondary importance and only takes place outside or, exceptionally, in the natural dynamics zone. Habitats with permanent management are, without exception, outside the natural dynamics zone. Active control of invasive alien species, which could endanger the conservation purposes of the national park, is only possible in the natural dynamics zone in exceptional cases, and must be specifically justified. The management of wild animals occurs exclusively within the framework of the requirements of the “Positionspapier Wildtierregulierung” (Nationale Naturlandschaften e. V./AG Nationalparke, 2020, in English “Position Paper on Wild Animal Control”). Wild animal control is limited as far as possible in terms of time and space, with the largest possible year-round hunting-free zones set up for this.

Assessment: In nearly all national parks, the active management of species and habitats plays a substantial role. The corresponding needs are, as a rule, identified in the respective national park plans and, with the exception of wildlife management (roe deer, red deer, fallow deer, wild boar, and in some cases mouflon and predators), are largely confined to the management zone.

Apart from wildlife management, species management within the natural dynamics zone is limited to individual cases. These concern non-native species, typically neophytes such as Douglas fir, black locust, grand fir and other woody species, as well as giant hogweed. In individual cases, neozoa such as raccoon are also addressed. In addition, predator control takes place in coastal bird breeding areas.

Of the 13 national parks with significant terrestrial areas (the Wadden Sea National Parks are not considered here), eleven carry out large-scale wildlife management, including within the natural dynamics zone. As a rule, efforts are evident to progressively reduce the intensity and spatial extent of wildlife management through the establishment and/or expansion of hunting-free zones. Such developments have so far often proceeded hesitantly, particularly within the natural dynamics zone. In six of these national parks, the integration of the immediate vicinity of the national park into wildlife management is not sufficient. The data basis regarding the browsing impact of ungulates (wildlife impact monitoring) within the national parks, and above all in their immediate vicinity, is also inadequate. In two cases, there is a substantial need for action to harmonise wildlife management on federal land (National Natural Heritage) with the objectives of the national parks.

Since 2021, young, still flightless bearded vultures have been released into the wild as part of the bearded vulture project run jointly by the Bavarian nature conservation association (Landesbund für Vogel- und Naturschutz, LBV) and Berchtesgaden National Park. The joint project aims to contribute to the re-establishment of the Central European Alpine population of this rare bird species, particularly in the Eastern Alps. In spring 2025, two further juveniles – Generl and Luisa – were successfully released into the wild in a rock niche in Klausbach valley.



5.4.5 Regulations on usage

Standard (target): The national park administration is not intended for economically determined material use of natural resources. They are totally excluded in the natural dynamics zone. If any usage takes place, it must not conflict with the conservation purposes. If there is still legitimate third-party usage that runs counter to the conservation purposes, the national park administration will work to ensure that it stops as soon as possible.

Assessment: Uses (often on the basis of existing third-party rights) play a role in all national parks. In seven cases, such uses have been significantly reduced, in many instances as a result of completed forest conversion. The transfer of existing

third-party usage rights (e.g. drinking water extraction, utility easements, rights of way (paths), collection rights, hunting, fisheries, and tourism) has consistently proven difficult and protracted. In four national parks, a reduction of such rights has not been achieved in the past ten years despite efforts to do so. Fishing activities that impair national park development still take place in just under half of the national parks. Particularly in those national parks with a high proportion of water bodies – especially those including marine areas – this impairment is also significant in spatial terms. As a rule, the national park plans do not formulate specific objectives or time frames for the termination of existing uses that are not compatible with conservation objectives.

5.4.6 Visitor guidance

Standard (target): Visitor guidance is based on a spatial concept that is part of the national park plan or the core paths plan, or was created in addition to it. In the national park, path restrictions and/or access prohibitions are legally binding. Routes and areas for visitors are selected and marked according to criteria based on nature conservation and nature experience in conformity with the primary conservation purpose of the national park.

Assessment: Visitor guidance receives a high level of attention in all national park administrations. Fourteen national parks have explicit visitor management concepts in place. Two national parks also have specifically developed digital management tools in the form of apps.

No weaknesses were identified with regard to this criterion in four national parks. In six national parks, the density of hiking trails still appears to be too high. In three national parks, insufficient staffing levels are leading to significant and increasing shortcomings in visitor guidance and visitor services.

5.4.7 Patrolling

Standard (target): The national park administration has field staff with mandatory authority to check compliance and conformity with nature protection in the national park, and punish where necessary. It has the staffing levels and personnel development to ensure this through regular and adequate presence on site. Where necessary, the national park administration is supported by other stakeholders.

Assessment: Patrolling constitutes a central focus of the ranger service in all national parks. In just under two thirds of the national parks, rangers possess statutory enforcement powers. However, in one-third of the national parks these powers are described as insufficient or, in some cases, entirely lacking, resulting in substantial shortcomings in site monitoring and the punishment of offences. In three national parks, external individuals or organisations support patrolling, in some cases on a voluntary basis.

The most serious weakness lies in insufficient staffing levels within the ranger service. In 15 of the 16 national parks, this results in an inadequate on-site presence – in particular during peak periods of visitor numbers.

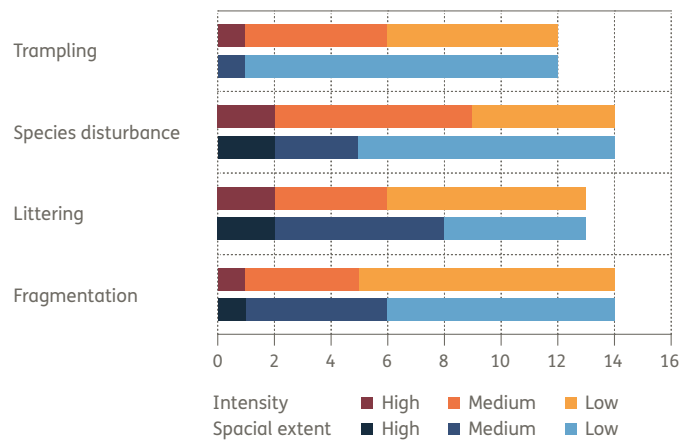


Figure 5: Conflicts with hiking routes, paths, and points of interest, which are not completely outside of particularly valuable and sensitive areas of national parks

5.4.8 Monitoring the success of measures

Standard (target): The implementation and effectiveness of the measures specified in the national park plan are evaluated through monitoring. The results are documented and usually made publicly available.

Assessment: In nearly all national parks, systematic monitoring of the success of measures takes place across all key areas of responsibility. Only in one national park are such evaluations possible in a rudimentary manner due to capacity constraints. Well over one third of the national parks

communicate the results of the monitoring carried out on a regular basis to the public. However, monitoring the success of measures remains incomplete in all national parks. Across the national parks as a whole, this affects almost all areas of responsibility, ranging from the evaluation of species and habitat management (including within the natural dynamics zone) to aspects of visitor and volunteer management as well as environmental education. As a rule, the necessary capacities for the development of methods and concepts for systematic monitoring of the success of measures are also lacking.

5.4.9 Strengths and weaknesses

The following overview summarises in bullet points the strengths and weaknesses of the national parks in the activity area “Management”.

Strengths	Weaknesses
All national parks have a vision that, as a rule, largely meets the requirements.	In a quarter of the national parks, national park plans are wholly or partially outdated. In half of the national parks, key national park-relevant aspects are not adequately reflected.
All national parks have national park plans in place.	In well over half of the national parks, restoration measures are still required even several decades after their establishment – often including within the natural dynamics zone.
In all national parks, restoration measures are generally implemented in the form of temporary initiating measures.	Of the 13 national parks with significant terrestrial areas, 11 still carry out large-scale wildlife management, including within the natural dynamics zone. In the majority of the national parks concerned, progress in reducing wildlife management within the natural dynamics zone has been slow and hesitant.
The management of species and habitats is well reflected in the national park plans in nearly all national parks and, with the exception of wildlife management, is largely concentrated within the management zones.	The transfer of third-party usage rights has proven difficult in all national parks; in some cases, no progress has been made in this regard over the past ten years.
Efforts are evident to progressively reduce wildlife management through the designation and enlargement of hunting-free zones.	National park plans often do not contain provisions for the transfer of existing usage rights, nor do they set out corresponding time frames.
In nearly all cases, material use has been significantly reduced – often as a result of completed initial measures (particularly forest conversion).	Fishing activities still take place in nearly half of the national parks, in some cases affecting substantial areas.
Visitor guidance has high priority in all national parks; 14 of the 16 national parks have visitor management concepts in place.	In six national parks, the density of hiking trails remains too high.
Patrolling is a core component of ranger duties in all national parks.	In three national parks, staff shortages are leading to significant and increasing shortcomings in visitor guidance and visitor services.
In two thirds of the national parks, staff members possess statutory enforcement powers.	In 15 of the 16 national parks, staff shortages result in inadequate patrolling.
In all national parks, monitoring the success of measures is regarded as an important management instrument.	In one third of the national parks, the statutory enforcement powers of staff are regarded as insufficient.
Well over one third of the national parks regularly communicate the results of monitoring the success of measures to the public.	Monitoring the success of measures is incomplete in all national parks; as a rule, sufficiently developed methodological and conceptual foundations are also lacking.

5.4.10 Comparison

Across the entire activity area “Management”, the overall picture is heterogeneous: improvements have been achieved in many areas. Several national park plans have been wholly or partially updated or supplemented by additional sub-plans. In other cases, the situation has deteriorated, particularly as a result of the failure to update plans. With regard to restoration, substantial progress is evident in most cases. In some national parks, it is foreseeable that restoration measures – particularly within the natural dynamics zones – can be concluded in the near future. Especially in terrestrial areas, uses have been substantially reduced, in particular through the completion of forest conversion measures. By contrast, in the national parks with marine areas, there have been no substantial changes in

fishing activities, including within the natural dynamics zones. At most, only isolated improvements have been achieved with regard to the transfer of existing third-party usage rights. Visitor guidance has been improved in many cases through the preparation and implementation of visitor guidance concepts. However, in two national parks a deterioration is also evident, attributable to declining staffing levels. For the same reason, the extent of patrolling and monitoring the success of measures has also decreased in these two national parks. Particularly in the latter respect, the contrast with many other national parks is striking, as clear progress has been made there, especially in monitoring the success of measures.

5.4.11 Key recommendations for action

- Updating of and thematic additions to national park plans
- Accelerated completion of restoration measures, particularly within the natural dynamics zone
- Reduction of wildlife management, particularly within the natural dynamics zone, and including the immediate vicinity of the national park
- Improvement of monitoring of the browsing impact of ungulates, both within the national park and in the immediate vicinity of the national park, as a basis for decision-making in wildlife management
- Monitoring of invasive alien species and, where appropriate, implementation of control measures – as far as possible, restricted to areas outside the natural dynamics zone
- Acceleration of the transfer of third-party usage rights
- Expedited termination of, in some cases still large-scale, uses within the natural dynamics zone, in particular fishing activities
- Further reduction of the hiking trail network, alongside the development and expansion of digital visitor guidance
- Strengthening of patrolling through regular and adequate on-site presence
- Expansion of success monitoring to all national parks-relevant management fields and, in some cases, the development of methodological and conceptual foundations

Rare species also benefit from peatland rewetting measures, such as the fire-bellied toad in Jasmund National Park



5.5 Activity area 5: Cooperation and sustainable regional development

Activity area 5 comprises seven quality criteria and the associated standards:

- 1) National and international cooperation
- 2) Regional cooperation
- 3) Integrating the national park into its region
- 4) Participation
- 5) Appreciation of the national park
- 6) Connecting national park and public transport
- 7) Impulses for the region

5.5.1 National and international cooperation

Standard (target): The national park administration cooperates with large-scale protected areas, both inside and outside Germany, in particular through reciprocal information and support.

Assessment: All national park administrations cooperate at a high professional level with other large protected areas in Germany. Almost three quarters of the national parks also engage in exchange with protected area administrations in other countries, for example in the Netherlands, Denmark, Poland, and Czechia.

Cooperation takes place within networks, working groups and committees, as well as in the context of joint projects. In some cases, cooperation cannot be maintained or expanded to the extent considered necessary or appropriate due to limited staff capacities. Overall, however, national park administrations cooperate extensively and with strong commitment with other large protected areas at both the national and international level.

5.5.2 Regional cooperation

Standard (target): The national park administration is supported in the fulfilment of its tasks by third parties (e. g., associations for the promotion of the national park, foundations). It uses cooperation and partnerships to attract as many relevant social groups as possible to support the national park goals. The national park administration is represented in relevant regional working groups and networks.

Assessment: All national park administrations are regionally well connected and work actively and closely with numerous stakeholder groups and organisations within regional networks, working groups, and committees.

They are supported by associations for the promotion of the national park, foundations, and other civil society groups. Cooperation with all the groups mentioned is described in most cases as open, trust-based and constructive. However, maintaining these partnerships is highly labour-intensive, and national park administrations do not always have sufficient staff to meet these demands in every case. Overall, the national parks are extensively and diversely embedded in regional networks, accompanied by a high level of acceptance and support for the national parks.

5.5.3 Integrating the national park into its region

Standard (target): The national park region is defined in the national park plan or another suitable document. The national park plan or another suitable document contains recommendations on developments in the national park region that are of particular importance for the achievement of the national park goals. The national park administration incorporates its interests into special planning and projects in the immediate vicinity of the national park. These are respected by the project management organisations, as well as the approval authorities, in accordance with the status of the national park as a “priority area for nature conservation”.

Assessment: The national park plans and, in some cases, also the national park acts or national park ordinances of almost three quarters of the national parks contain clear and comprehensive definitions and recommendations regarding the spatial and thematic development of the national park region that are relevant to achieving the national park objectives. In well over a quarter of the national parks, such information is lacking. As statutory consultees, national park administrations are in most cases involved in spatially relevant planning processes and projects both within and in the immediate vicinity of the national park region. In doing so, they are generally able to present their interests adequately, although these are not always taken into account.



Tree-top walk, Bavarian Forest National Park

5.5.4 Participation

Standard (target): The national park administration conducts regular, direct, and appreciative dialogue with the relevant target groups and the public. In the case of decisions by the national park administration that have an impact on the national park and/or the national park region, the stakeholders concerned are given an appropriate opportunity at an early stage to find out about the goals and content of the project and to submit proposals.

Assessment: The national park administrations formally and professionally involve regional stakeholders closely in the development of the national parks and, where appropri-

ate, the national park region, and generally work with them in a relationship of trust. They regularly inform and engage various target groups and the wider public through numerous communication and participation formats, including advisory boards and other committees. However, the sometimes limited staffing levels of the national park administrations place constraints on these activities and, in some cases, lead to limitations in the involvement of regional stakeholders. Overall, the national park administrations largely ensure professional, often wide-ranging and occasion-specific communication and, particularly in important matters, provide for the early involvement of those concerned.

5.5.5 Appreciation of the national park

Standard (target): Both the national park itself and the national park administration are recognised and valued in the region. For this purpose, the national park administration communicates the national park goals, its decisions, positive effects, and any restrictions in a comprehensible and transparent manner. The national park administration uses appropriate methods to regularly assess the image, appreciation, and acceptance of the national park among residents of the immediate vicinity and visitors to the national park. The national park administration uses the results to review its communication strategy and activities.

Assessment: The national parks largely enjoy a high level of acceptance and appreciation within the region, both among local residents and visitors. Public and media reporting on the national parks is predominantly positive, and the press work of most administrations is intensive and comprehensive. However, the image, as well as levels of appreciation and acceptance, are (regularly) monitored in only just under half of the national parks. In two national parks that have faced challenging circumstances in recent years (forest fires and bark beetle outbreaks), declines in acceptance have become apparent.

5.5.6 Connecting national park and public transport

Standard (target): The national park is easily accessible all year round by public transport. Regional public transport includes suitable areas of the national park in such a way that private vehicle use is reduced and the conservation purposes are not impaired.

Assessment: Around three quarters of the national parks are well connected to public transport. In addition, several initiatives are in place to further strengthen public transport and sustainable mobility and to improve connections with the surrounding region. Nevertheless, just under half of the national parks experience generally or locally high traffic pressure from private vehicle use.

5.5.7 Impulses for the region

Standard (target): The national park contributes to a positive regional image. The national park administration provides impulses for sustainable development of the national park region in accordance with the goals of the national park. It supports corresponding activities of other stakeholders in all areas of sustainability, especially in sustainable tourism. The socio-economic effects of the national park on the region are regularly recorded, analysed, and publicly communicated. The results are used for measures to secure and, as far as possible, to strengthen positive effects.

Assessment: Almost all national parks make a significant contribution to the visibility and positive image of their region. They serve as important image ambassadors, particularly through distinctive attractions. The national park administrations reinforce this positive effect by creating attractive opportunities and facilities for local residents and visitors.

However, the socio-economic effects of the national parks on the region are regularly assessed in only just under half of the national parks.

Horse-drawn carriage ride across the tidal flats between the mainland and the island of Neuwerk, Hamburg Wadden Sea National Park



5.5.8 Strengths and weaknesses

The following overview summarises in bullet points the strengths and weaknesses of the national parks in the activity area “Cooperation and sustainable regional development”.

Strengths	Weaknesses
All national parks maintain active exchange with other protected areas in Germany.	Limited staff capacities restrict the possibilities for international cooperation in some national parks.
Three quarters of the national parks also cooperate with protected areas in other countries.	Limited staff resources constrain opportunities for regional cooperation in certain cases.
All national park administrations work closely with regional partners within regional networks.	The national park administration is not always consulted as a statutory consultee in projects in the immediate vicinity of the national park. Even when it is involved in this capacity, the interests raised have not always been adequately taken into account.
For almost three quarters of the national parks, the national park region is defined and substantively elaborated in the relevant documents.	In around half of the national parks, the socio-economic effects are not assessed on a regular basis; in these cases, they have been measured only once.
All national park administrations inform and engage regional stakeholders.	Analyses of acceptance are conducted regularly in only a proportion of the national parks.
Acceptance of the national parks is predominantly high, and media reporting about the national parks is largely positive.	
Most national parks are well accessible by public transport.	
Almost all national parks serve as important image ambassadors for their region.	

5.5.9 Comparison

Compared with the first and interim evaluations, improvements in international and national cooperation have been observed in a quarter of the national parks, while one national park has experienced a deterioration. Increases and/or improvements and intensification of regional cooperation are evident in more than half of the national parks. However, in

well over a quarter of the national parks, a spatial definition of the national park region is still lacking. In well over a quarter of the national parks, acceptance of the national parks has improved. Compared with the first and interim evaluations, well over a quarter of the national parks have even been able to strengthen their impulses for the region.

5.5.10 Key recommendations for action

- Clear substantive and spatial definition of the national park region and its development in the national park plan and/or in the national park act or national park ordinance, where this has not yet been established
- Stronger consideration of national park interests in projects and planning processes in the immediate vicinity of the national park that may have negative impacts on the national park
- Regular conduct of acceptance analyses among residents in the immediate vicinity of the national park and among visitors to the national park
- Regular assessment of the regional economic and social effects of the national parks
- More intensive communication of the results of regional and socio-economic studies in order to strengthen acceptance of the national park within the region

5.6 Activity area 6: External communication

Activity area 6 comprises two quality criteria and the associated standards:

- 1) Communication structure
- 2) Corporate design

5.6.1 Communication structure

Standard (target): The national park has a written communication strategy that includes the goals, content, and methods of external communication. The external communication explains the goals, tasks, and activities of the national park or the national park administration in a clear and understandable manner for specific target groups. The national park administration communicates with relevant target groups at regional and national level, using digital (homepage, newsletter, blog, social media, etc.) and non-digital means (telephone enquiries, public meetings, newspapers, annual reports, etc.). The stakeholders concerned, as well as the general public, are regularly and proactively kept up-to-date. Any further communication with the respective target groups is dialogue-oriented, direct, and appreciative. An ongoing, institutionalised communication structure has been created for partners such as higher authorities and regional committees, as well as special purpose, nature conservation, and tourism associations.

Assessment: Public relations play a significant role in all national parks, and the standard is largely met. The nature and scope of communication measures depend on the respective capacities of the national park administrations; in four national parks, insufficient staff are available for this central task.

Just under half of the national parks have a communication strategy in place. In all national parks, the target groups are very broad; however, only three national park administrations have so far systematically assessed the (target group-specific) effects of their communication measures. This is due, inter alia, to the fact that communication is often not tailored to specific target groups or strategically planned with them in mind, and that most national parks lack the necessary capacities for such work.



Figure 6: Evaluation reports for all 16 national parks in the corporate design "Nationale Naturlandschaften"

All national park administrations provide information and communicate at regional and supra-regional level, using a wide range of analogue and digital media and formats (conferences, forums, press releases, leaflets, websites, social media, among others). Just under half of the national parks document these activities in their annual reports.

Established communication structures exist between national park administrations and their superior authorities, tourism associations, regional committees, and special-purpose associations; these are used to varying degrees and with differing continuity depending on need and relevance. Continuous contact with nature conservation organisations exists in only well over a quarter of the national parks; in the others, contact is occasional and sporadic.

5.6.2 Corporate design

Standard (target): In all its communications, the national park administration presents the national park using the uniform corporate design of “Nationale Naturlandschaften” (in English: National Natural Landscapes).

Assessment: Three quarters of the national parks apply the corporate design (CD) of the joint umbrella brand “Nationale Naturlandschaften”. Well over half of the national parks have dispensed with the use of their former national park logo; two national parks are combining the CD (in particular the logo) with that of National Natural Landscapes during a transitional period of five years.

Four national parks do not apply the joint corporate design consistently, or at all. In two cases, this is due to binding requirements imposed by the respective state government. In one national park, the corporate design was developed as a regional brand within the framework of a broad participatory process and is highly valued by many people. In another national park, its own design had only just been introduced at the time the corporate design of the National Natural Landscapes was renewed, with the result that the national park is perceived primarily as a regional brand. As a consequence, the potential of a unified corporate design under the umbrella brand “Nationale Naturlandschaften” has not yet been fully realised.

5.6.3 Strengths and weaknesses

The following overview summarises in bullet points the strengths and weaknesses of the national parks in the activity area “External communication”.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Just under half of the national parks have a communication strategy in place; however, even in the absence of such a strategy, intensive external communication takes place.	There is insufficient knowledge of the (target group-specific) effects of messages and communication measures.
All national park administrations implement a wide range of communication measures, using both analogue and digital formats.	Communication structures with nature conservation associations are used on a continuous basis by only just over a quarter of national park administrations.
All national park administrations maintain established communication structures with their superior authorities, tourism associations, and regional committees.	In a quarter of the national parks, the joint corporate design “Nationale Naturlandschaften” is not applied, or not applied exclusively.
Three quarters of the national parks use the joint corporate design “Nationale Naturlandschaften”.	

5.6.4 Comparison

In the activity area “External communication”, a positive development has been observed in all national parks since the first evaluation conducted between 2009 and 2012.

Communication measures have been maintained both quantitatively and qualitatively and, in the majority of the national parks, have even been expanded. For their public relations work, national park administrations increasingly make use of various digital formats such as social media, video channels, and national park apps. Since the last evaluation, the issue of accessibility has also gained societal relevance, which the clear majority of the national parks address through accessible or low-barrier websites.

Existing communication strategies or concepts have been updated or are now in place for the first time, so that just under half of the national park administrations now align their public relations work with them. However, national park administrations without a formally documented strategy also carry out intensive communication and public relations activities.

The use of the joint corporate design “Nationale Naturlandschaften” has also improved further.

5.6.5 Key recommendations for action

- Increased and target group-specific communication of the core message “Let nature be nature”
- Enhanced evaluation of the effect of the national park administration’s communication measures
- Consistent use of the corporate design “Nationale Naturlandschaften” across all national parks communication channels, in combination with the local logo where appropriate

Grey seals on Kachelotplate, west of the island of Juist, Lower Saxon Wadden Sea National Park. The results of the counts of grey seals and harbour seals are regularly published on the website of the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat.



5.7 Activity area 7: Education and nature experience

Activity area 7 comprises five quality criteria and the associated standards:

- 1) Education strategy
- 2) Education opportunities
- 3) Opportunities for nature experiences and recreation
- 4) Visitor infrastructure
- 5) Accessibility and inclusion

5.7.1 Education strategy

Standard (target): The national park administration has an educational strategy, in particular for nature and wilderness education, which provides specific educational programmes for all major target groups. The principles of education work in the national park are coordinated with education partners.

Assessment: All national park administrations work with an education strategy in order to plan, implement, and coordinate their nature and wilderness education programmes in a targeted manner. Well over three quarters of the national parks also cooperate with external partners in this context.

5.7.2 Educational programmes

Standard (target): Educational programmes in the national park serve to convey its conservation purposes, the goals and measures necessary for its preservation, development, and other purposes, its natural history features, sentimental and emotional values, the concept of wilderness, and sustainable development goals. The educational programmes in the national park are coordinated with education partners. All educational programmes are controlled and evaluated by the national park administration. Where necessary, the educational programmes are multilingual. The national park has an information centre and decentralised information facilities. The national park administration also provides educational programmes in areas in which natural dynamics are undisturbed. The national park administration has clear rules for education work that are accepted by everyone, thus ensuring respect for nature in the areas where education measures take place. The national park administration participates in the nationwide Junior Ranger Programme run by the organisation Nationale Naturlandschaften e. V. (registered Association of National Natural Landscapes).

Assessment: The educational programmes in the national parks are broad in scope and, in well over three quarters of the national parks, are tailored to the specific characteristics of the respective area. All national parks have at least one central or several decentralised information centres or information points, which are operated either by the national park administration itself or in close cooperation with environmental organisations and/or municipalities. In eight national parks, demand exceeds supply due to limited staff capacities. All national parks participate in the nationwide Junior Ranger Programme within their respective capacities (on average, approximately three groups per national park).

A systematic evaluation of educational programmes is lacking in well over half of the national parks.

In almost all national parks, multilingual educational and information services are available. Around three quarters of the national parks provide multilingual information materials, permanent exhibitions in several languages, multilingual information and display panels at key access points to the national park and at important locations within the area, as well as multilingual digital content, lectures and guided walks.

5.7.3 Opportunities for nature experience and recreation

Standard (target): The range of nature experiences is varied, available all year, can be accompanied or done individually, and is aimed at all social groups. In all of this, it is ensured that the national park's conservation purposes are not impaired. The national park administration coordinates and evaluates the opportunities for nature experience and recreation.

Assessment: All national parks offer a broad range of nature experience opportunities, which are supported by the national park administrations and, in around three quarters of the national parks, regularly evaluated. In three national parks, nature experience activities by visitors, or high visitor numbers, pose at least localised risks to the conservation objectives.

5.7.4 Visitor infrastructure

Standard (target): The existing visitor infrastructure in the national park is appropriate to the landscape and is visitor-oriented, without impairing the conservation purposes. On-site marking and signage is uniform and recognisable everywhere.

Assessment: Visitor numbers in the national parks vary considerably depending on their size, location, and the region’s historical tourism significance. In most national parks, they range between 500,000 and 4 million, with the overall spectrum extending from approximately 70,000 to around 21 million.

5.7.5 Accessibility and inclusion

Standard (target): The national park administration has a strategy for accessibility and inclusion. The national park administration provides barrier-free access, opportunities, information, and print media to an appropriate extent.

Assessment: Accessibility and inclusion were not included in the standards of the first evaluation (2009–2012) or the interim evaluation (2015–2018) and have been newly incorporated here. Nevertheless, the associated considerations are already taken into account in all national parks within the scope of their respective capacities. Relevant concepts are in place in half of the national parks. The range of measures extends from accessible information centres and themed trails to accessible websites and printed materials in easy-to-read language. Through the diversity and creativity of their accessible and inclusive offerings, individual national park assume a pioneering role within and for their region.

Despite these differences, all national parks have visitor infrastructure that is tailored to target groups and appropriate to the natural setting, and that effectively guides visitor behaviour. In two national parks, limited resources have led to a decline in quality, which is particularly evident in the lack of up-to-date facilities at information points and centres.

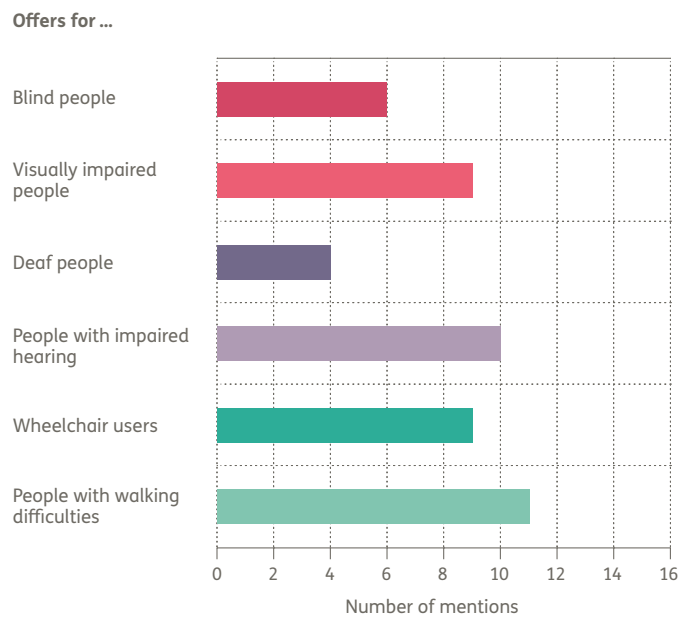


Figure 7: (Partially) barrier-free guided tours and ranger walks in national parks

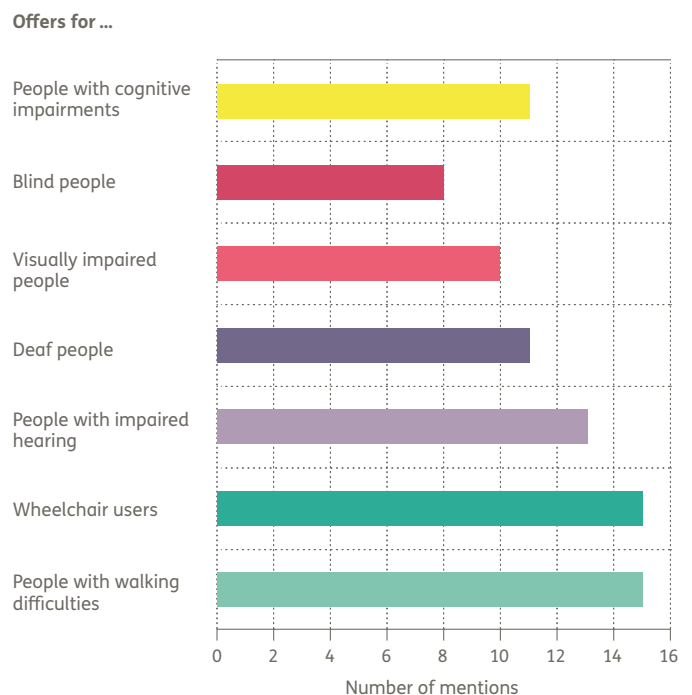


Figure 8: (Partially) barrier-free offers in national park information centres



Information in Braille and tactile exhibits for blind and visually impaired people, Eifel National Park

5.7.6 Strengths and weaknesses

The following overview summarises in bullet points the strengths and weaknesses of the national parks in the activity area “Education and nature experience”.

Strengths	Weaknesses
All national parks have educational strategies in place.	A systematic evaluation of educational programmes is lacking in well over half of the national parks.
All national parks offer a broad thematic range of educational opportunities with national park-specific references.	In half of the national parks, demand for environmental education programmes cannot be met due to insufficient staff.
All national parks provide a wide spectrum of nature and wilderness experience opportunities.	Facilities at information centres are outdated in two national parks.
In all national parks, visitor infrastructure effectively guides visitor use.	In three national parks, conservation objectives are occasionally affected by nature experience activities.
The topic of “accessibility and inclusion” is addressed by all national park administrations within the scope of their capacities; two national parks assume a pioneering role in their respective region.	In just under half of the national parks, no up-to-date accessibility concept is in place; in well over half, the range of accessible information and activities could be further developed.
All national parks participate in the nationwide Junior Ranger Programme.	
In almost all national parks, multilingual educational and information services are available.	



Environmental education centre, Hainich National Park

5.7.7 Comparison

The high standard of diverse, target group-specific educational and information services has been maintained or even further expanded in all national parks. Compared with the first evaluation, all national parks now have an educational strategy in place and participate in the national Junior Ranger Programme. However, limited financial and staff capacities continue to result in demand exceeding supply in around half of the national parks, particularly in programmes such as “Junior Ranger”, “National Park Schools” and “National Park Nurseries”, and in some cases prevent the continuation of existing activities.

Visitor management and on-site facilities are of a good standard; however, in three national parks, conservation objectives are adversely affected by nature experience activities. In two national parks, the facilities at information points and centres are outdated.

Multilingual provision in educational and information services has improved significantly; with the exception of one national park, all now provide services in at least two languages.

The standard relating to accessibility and inclusion was assessed for the first time. All national park administrations have already addressed the issue, and two national parks assume a pioneering role in this regard, including within their respective regions.

5.7.8 Key recommendations for action

- Updating and refining the educational strategy
- Developing ways to meet the high demand for educational opportunities despite staff shortages
- Reducing pressures within the area arising from nature experience activities
- Regular evaluation of educational and nature experience opportunities in the national park
- Preparation of concepts relating to accessibility and inclusion
- Gradual introduction of additional (partially) accessible opportunities

5.8 Activity area 8: Research and monitoring

Activity area 8 comprises three quality criteria and the associated standards:

- 1) Research content and research coordination
- 2) Monitoring
- 3) Documentation

5.8.1 Research content and research coordination

Standard (target): The national park plan contains a research strategy. Research and monitoring in the national park goal, in particular at improving management in the national park (and in other protected areas) and better understanding the natural dynamics, their processes, and the resulting opportunities for society. Research in the national park only takes place if it a) does not impair the conservation purposes, b) clearly relates to specific national park research questions, and c) is dependent on the special situation of the national park and, therefore, cannot be carried out outside of it. In the case of planned third-party research projects, the national park administration decides whether requirements a) – c) apply and whether or not the project can be carried out.

Assessment: Taken as a whole across all national parks, the standard is largely met. However, in a small number of national parks, considerable constraints arise in some cases due to very limited financial, staff and time resources (see Chapter 5.2.1). Nevertheless, high-quality research projects are conducted in all national parks within the scope of their respective capacities; with one exception, these are based on a research concept. In eight national parks, this concept forms part of the national park plan, and in two Wadden Sea National Parks it forms part of trinational agreements.

Research in all national parks is predominantly or at least partly oriented towards, and dependent on, issues relating to the management and specific circumstances of the respective national park; in more than three quarters of the national parks, the results were incorporated into the design of management measures. In addition, the results of many projects conducted in the national parks are also relevant for other national parks or for nature conservation more broadly, for example where undisturbed processes in the natural dynamics zones can serve as a reference for a better understanding of ecosystem processes, including on managed land. However, the potential of this approach has not yet been fully realised. In eight national parks, research does not impair the conservation purposes; in a further eight, it does so only to a minor extent.

All national parks carry out research projects in cooperation with external partners – whether other protected areas, administrative bodies, non-university research institutes, universities, or other stakeholders. In two national parks, research is conducted exclusively by external partners. Funding is provided both from national park budgets and other state funds, as well as from federal or EU sources. Accordingly, the list of research partners is correspondingly diverse.

In all national parks, decision-making authority regarding the implementation of research projects by third parties lies wholly or predominantly with the national park administration.

Water sampling, Bavarian Forest National Park





Lynx at an experimental set-up, Harz National Park: the aim of a three-year project, in which almost all national parks are participating, is the enrichment of wildlife carcasses (dead animal biomass) as a counterpart to the already successfully implemented enrichment of deadwood (dead plant biomass) in ecosystems.

5.8.2 Monitoring

Standard (target): The natural and social science monitoring in the national park is carried out to an appropriate extent with the help of recognised methods and parameters; it is oriented towards the objectives and conservation purposes of the national park. Among other things, it serves to monitor the success of measures defined in the national park plan. The national park participates in the integrative monitoring of large-scale protected areas.

Assessment: In all national parks, ecosystem and social science monitoring is conducted to varying extents and is consistently oriented towards issues relevant to the national parks and thus to their objectives and conservation purposes. Monitoring is carried out using recognised methods and parameters. With the exception of the Wadden Sea National Parks, all national parks participate in the integrative monitoring programme for large protected areas; the Wadden Sea National Parks, however, are integrated into comprehensive alternative monitoring programmes.

Nevertheless, minor (and, in some cases, significant) shortcomings persist in almost all national parks. Only in one national park were no weaknesses identified. In ten national parks, important baseline data are lacking, for example on certain species groups, forest development, changes resulting from climate change, new infrastructure (e.g., wind turbines) and other anthropogenic influences, or on socio-economic parameters. Also, in ten national parks (largely overlapping with those mentioned above), existing data have not yet been analysed in a targeted manner; in some cases, they cannot be evaluated at all due to insufficient staff resources. In isolated cases, there are also weaknesses in linking ecological and socio-economic data.

Nevertheless, more than three quarters of the national park administrations make use of available monitoring results – in some cases, very extensively – to review the effectiveness of management measures and, where necessary, improve them. The remaining national parks do so at least to some extent, although not to the possible or required degree. Examples of implemented adjustments concern species management (including that of the bark beetle), the delineation between the natural dynamics and management zones, management for specific habitats, forest fire prevention, and visitor guidance.

5.8.3 Documentation

Standard (target): The methods used in the baseline survey, in monitoring, and in project research are documented. The data obtained is processed, analysed, evaluated, and documented following scientific criteria. The results are made available to the public in an appropriate and suitable manner.

Assessment: Data generated through research and monitoring are stored in databases in all national parks; however, in ten national parks they are not consistently prepared promptly, comprehensively, and in a purpose-oriented manner (see Chapter 5.8.2), which limits their usability. Where data are processed, this is generally done in accordance with scientific standards. In five national parks, the data infrastructure does not meet requirements, particularly with regard to handling large volumes of data. The underlying causes are technical (hardware, software, storage capacity), data protection-related, and staffing-related.

All national park administrations publish their research findings at least in part. However, three national parks show very limited activity in this regard, as their constrained resources already restrict their capacity to carry out research, monitoring, and targeted data collection and analysis. Publication takes place through a variety of channels. These publications are aimed both at national (13 national parks) and international (11 national parks) specialist audiences and, through popular science communication, at the wider interested public (15 national parks). Eight national parks have their own series of publications and also contribute to English-language scientific journals, although not always as the lead authoring institution. Between 12 and 14 national parks use their websites, German-language specialist journals, national and international symposia and conferences, as well as lecture opportunities within their region for knowledge transfer. In addition, staff members of the national park administrations are regularly kept informed.

5.8.4 Strengths and weaknesses

The following overview summarises in bullet points the strengths and weaknesses of the national parks in the activity area “Research and monitoring”.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Fifteen national park administrations have a research concept in place, on the basis of which high-quality research projects are conducted in the national parks to varying extents. These are carried out across federal state and at EU level, as well as in cooperation with other protected areas and external research institutions.	Five national parks are significantly understaffed for the effective fulfilment of research and monitoring tasks.
Many research projects conducted in the national parks generate important insights for nature conservation as a whole.	In ten national parks, important baseline data are lacking – particularly socio-economic data, but also ecological data. In a further ten parks, such data have not yet been analysed to the necessary extent.
In all national parks, ecosystem monitoring is in place; in 15 national parks, socio-economic monitoring is also conducted, although not always to the required extent.	In six national parks, the prerequisites for establishing a digital data infrastructure commensurate with the tasks at hand are barely in place or only very limitedly so.
More than three quarters of the national parks make extensive use of research and/or monitoring results to evaluate and improve their management measures; the remainder do so only to a limited extent.	Only eight national parks publish their research findings in English-language scientific journals, and even then rarely under the leadership of the national park administrations.
Where research findings are available, they are published in the majority of the national parks through a wide range of channels, both for the scientific specialist community and for the interested public.	With regard to the wider public, research findings are often not prepared in a manner tailored to specific target groups.

5.8.5 Comparison

A comparison of the results of this evaluation with those of the first and interim evaluations reveals a threefold differentiation among the national parks. Four national parks, whose research, monitoring and documentation/publication were already at a very high level in 2010, have been able to maintain or even further improve this standard. In contrast, there are four national parks whose activities were and continue to be at a very low level due to insufficient capacities. Only minor improvements have been achieved here; in one

case, the fulfilment of monitoring tasks has even deteriorated due to staff reductions. The remaining eight national parks fall between these two groups. Depending on the individual national park, they have achieved improvements to varying degrees, for example through the development of a research concept, the expansion of monitoring activities, or an increase in publication efforts. Nevertheless, shortcomings persist across all areas.

5.8.6 Key recommendations for action

- Collection and analysis of currently unavailable ecosystem and socio-economic baseline data
- Stronger utilisation of the potential of research into natural dynamics as a reference for the development of land used for agriculture and forestry outside the national parks
- Increased use of research and monitoring results for management purposes
- Improvement of monitoring in the marine component of those national parks that include marine areas
- Improving the collection, processing, and storage of data as a prerequisite for the effective use of research findings in management and for their dissemination through publications
- Strengthening of target group-specific communication of research findings through various media, from the local to the international level
- Expansion of digital infrastructure (software and hardware, storage capacity) to enable the effective and efficient analysis of large data volumes

Old, structurally rich deciduous and mixed forests with scattered clearings and forest meadows are the preferred habitat of the wildcat. Particularly in upland areas, it is (once again) present, as shown here in Kellerwald-Edersee National Park, as well as in Eifel, Hainich, Harz, and Hunsrück-Hochwald. Population trends are recorded through wildcat monitoring.



Acronyms and abbreviations

BfN	Federal Agency for Nature Conservation
BNatSchG	Federal Nature Conservation Act
BUKEA	Department of Environment, Climate, Energy and Agriculture, State of Hamburg
BUND	German Federation for the Environment and Nature Conservation
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CD	Corporate Design
DLR	German Aerospace Center
EEZ	Eclusive Economic Zone
EMAS	Eco Management and Audit Scheme
EU	European Union
e. V.	Registered Association
IT	Information Technology
LANA	Federal/State Working Group on Nature Conservation, Landscape Management and Recreation
MLUK	Ministry of Agriculture, Food, Environment and Consumer Protection of the State of Brandenburg
NABU	Nature And Biodiversity Conservation Union
NBS	National Biodiversity Strategy
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NI	Lower Saxony
NNL	National natural landscapes
SDC	Staff development concept
SMEKUL	Saxon State Ministry for Energy, Climate Protection, Environment and Agriculture
ST	Saxony-Anhalt
StMUV	Bavarian State Ministry of the Environment and Consumer Protection
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation



View towards Pramort on East Zingst,
Western Pomerania Lagoon Area National Park



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