



# Transboundary Parks

E U R O P A R C

## GUIDELINES FOR PROTECTED AREAS

Becoming a member of **EUROPARC**  
Transboundary Parks Programme



# Welcome to the EUROPARC Transboundary Community

Thank you for your interest in the EUROPARC Transboundary Parks Programme! Whether you have already registered or are considering taking the next step, this guide will provide you with a comprehensive overview of the programme and the journey towards certification.

By becoming a certified EUROPARC Transboundary Area, you will join a vibrant network of experts committed to advancing cross-border cooperation.

## **Certification offers a range of benefits, including:**

- **Structured Guidance:** Gain from a thorough analytical process, including internal and external assessments, to enhance your transboundary cooperation efforts, regardless of certification outcomes.
- **Expert Recommendations:** Receive tailored advice to help you develop and strengthen your initiatives.
- **Recognition:** Achieve national and international acclaim upon certification, motivating your team for future successes.
- **Enhanced Visibility:** Boost the profile of your Protected Area among local communities, visitors, and stakeholders, showcasing the broader transboundary region.
- **Shared Learning Opportunities:** Join a community of European transboundary parks to exchange experiences and knowledge, particularly through the annual TransParcNet Meeting, hosted by a different certified area each year.

This manual introduces the EUROPARC Transboundary Parks Programme and the Basic Standards for Transboundary Cooperation between European Protected Areas. It provides essential information about the steps involved in applying for certification, offering clear guidance to make your journey as smooth as possible.

If you haven't registered yet, we encourage you to submit your registration form to EUROPARC Headquarters to formalise your candidacy and gain access to additional resources. For those already registered, congratulations on taking this important step! You are now officially a candidate for the prestigious Transboundary Parks Programme.

# About Us

Founded in 1973, the **EUROPARC Federation** has grown to become Europe's largest network of Protected Areas, uniting over 400 members across 40 countries.

At EUROPARC, we believe that Europe's natural heritage is stronger when we work together. By fostering international and cross-border cooperation, we empower Protected Areas to achieve more effective conservation and sustainable management.

Our mission goes beyond protection—we are committed to building a connected green network across Europe. Through dynamic networking opportunities, knowledge exchange, and innovative collaborations, EUROPARC supports Protected Areas in addressing the challenges of today while preparing for the needs of tomorrow.

With a steadfast focus on improving nature conservation and sustainable development practices, we aim to ensure that Europe's natural treasures thrive—for the benefit of nature, communities, and future generations.

**Join us.** and be part of a movement shaping a greener, more sustainable Europe.



# Terms and Ethical Standards

## Key Terms

*Transboundary Park:* A Protected Area that adjoins or lies adjacent to international borders.

*EUROPARC Transboundary Area:* Two or more Protected Areas awarded the EUROPARC Transboundary Certificate.

*EUROPARC Transboundary Certificate:* A certificate granted by the EUROPARC Council to Protected Areas that successfully complete the evaluation process for transboundary cooperation.

*TransParcNet:* A dynamic network of managers and staff from Protected Areas that have received the EUROPARC Transboundary Certificate.

## Ethical Standards

The EUROPARC Transboundary Parks Programme reflects the belief that Europe's natural heritage is best preserved through international collaboration, despite the complexities of cross-border management. More than a certification process, it fosters cooperation, encouraging partners to overcome challenges and work towards effective nature conservation.

Participants commit to high standards of collaboration and the programme's ethical principles. Misuse of the certification process, including applying pressure on partners, is strictly prohibited and may result in certificate withdrawal.

In cases of partnership difficulties, EUROPARC and its Steering and Evaluation Committee (STEC) offer support to strengthen cooperation. This programme symbolises a shared commitment to a greener, unified Europe where **nature knows no borders**.



# Costs and Conditions

## For whom is it intended?

The EUROPARC Transboundary Parks Programme welcomes European Protected Areas located along or near international borders. To join the programme, **membership in the EUROPARC Federation is a prerequisite**. If you are not yet a member, kindly initiate the membership application process with the EUROPARC Federation. After our Council reviews and approves your membership application, you can proceed to register as a candidate for the EUROPARC Transboundary Parks Programme.

## What are the expenses involved?

As it is customary, there are costs associated with the certification process that we request your contribution towards. The overall expenses for the certification process will be shared among the applying parties and include the following:

- **Registration fee** (for candidacy as protected areas): **EUR 500,00**
- **Verification fee** (for administration of the application and verification process): **EUR 3,000**
- **Re-evaluation fee after 5 years** (for certificate renewal): **EUR 2,000**

Additionally, you are responsible for covering the costs related to local travel, accommodation and board for the verifiers.

For further familiarisation with the programme itself as well as the application steps, please refer to the next pages of this document.

For any additional questions or clarifications, please don't hesitate to contact us at [europarc@europarc.org](mailto:europarc@europarc.org) or by calling us at +49 (0) 941 5993598-0.

# 1. INTRODUCTION TO THE EUROPARC TRANSBOUNDARY PARKS PROGRAMME AND THE “BASIC STANDARDS”

## 1.1 Rationale

Cross-border collaboration between Protected Areas is crucial for conserving Europe's shared natural and cultural heritage. These partnerships not only protect ecosystems but also foster sustainable development, international peace, and the vision of a unified Europe.

Since the late 1980s, the need for transboundary cooperation has grown with the increasing number of Protected Areas near or across national borders. Workshops, seminars, and expert groups have highlighted the importance of these efforts.

The EUROPARC Federation has been at the forefront of these initiatives, introducing the “Basic Standards for Transboundary Cooperation between European Protected Areas” in 1999. These standards provide a practical framework of criteria and steps to achieve effective and lasting cross-border collaboration.

## 1.2 History of the Programme

EUROPARC's commitment to transboundary cooperation began in 1988 with its first conference on transfrontier parks in Worriken, Belgium. This laid the groundwork for decades of progress, including participation in the IUCN's Parks for Life programme in 1994.

In 1999, EUROPARC developed draft standards for transfrontier partnerships, which were refined through an international seminar in Retz, Austria. By 2000, the “Basic Standards” gained formal approval from leading organisations, including the European Commission, UNESCO, and the IUCN.

To ensure their practicality, EUROPARC tested the framework in three Protected Areas, refined it based on feedback, and secured IUCN endorsement. In 2003, the standards were officially launched at the 5th World Parks Congress in Durban, South Africa, marking a major milestone in transboundary conservation.

This comprehensive approach laid the foundation for robust, measurable, and enduring cross-border collaboration across Europe.

### 1.3 Programme Description

Since its official launch in 2003, the EUROPARC Transboundary Parks Programme has certified over 20 Protected Areas in Europe. Up-to-date information on certified areas is available on the EUROPARC website.

The programme offers a robust verification and certification system, designed to promote and facilitate transboundary cooperation among European Protected Areas. It includes four key components:

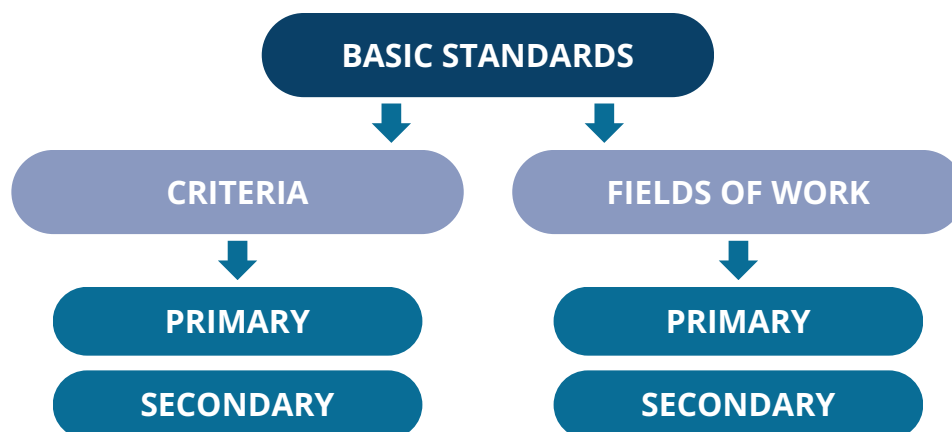
1. **Unique “Basic Standards”:** A comprehensive set of 14 criteria for assessing and improving cross-border partnerships.
2. **Evaluation Process:** Conducted by independent external verifiers.
3. **Formal Certification:** Awarded as “EUROPARC Transboundary Area” upon meeting required standards.
4. **Re-evaluation and Monitoring:** A mandatory reassessment every five years ensures continuous improvement and sustainability.



## 2. "BASIC STANDARDS" – INDICATORS FOR SUCCESSFUL TRANSBOUNDARY COOPERATION

Co-governance of cross-border Protected Areas is widely recognised as a key factor in achieving shared goals in nature protection, promoting healthier biodiversity and more effective conservation outcomes. To support and enhance these efforts, the "Basic Standards" were developed as a framework to ensure high-quality transboundary cooperation while encouraging continuous improvement. These standards provide clear guidelines that:

- Serve as a foundation for the objective evaluation of cross-border collaboration.
- Motivate Protected Areas to enhance their practices and strengthen partnerships.
- Offer formal recognition for effective transboundary cooperation.



Basic Standards.

As visible on the above graph, the "Basic Standards" are structured into two main categories: Criteria and Fields of Work. Each part is then further divided into Primary and Secondary subcategories to indicate the priority and depth of required actions. Together, they outline actionable, measurable activities essential for effective and sustainable transboundary cooperation.



## 2.1 Criteria

Criteria focus on the fundamental actions required to establish and maintain quality cooperation. These criteria provide a robust framework for building long-term partnerships.

- **Primary Criteria:**

There are five essential criteria which form the foundation of effective transboundary cooperation. They address critical aspects necessary for ensuring strong and sustainable partnerships.

- **Secondary Criteria:**

The four supporting criteria deepen and enhance the quality of cooperation. While not foundational, they are vital for creating a more comprehensive and impactful collaboration.

## 2.2 Fields of Work

Fields of Work represent the primary areas where transboundary parks are encouraged to engage in cross-border activities. While nature and landscape conservation remain the core focus, the Fields of Work extend to additional areas that enhance the overall impact of transboundary efforts.

- **Primary Field of Work:**

Conservation activities directly related to nature and landscape protection form the cornerstone of transboundary cooperation and are considered essential.

- **Secondary Fields of Work:**

These four supporting areas expand the scope of cooperation, encompassing activities related to education, recreation, socio-cultural objectives, and other complementary goals. These activities not only enhance the primary conservation efforts but also promote community engagement and sustainable regional development.

All together, the “Basic Standards” therefore establish a clear and structured framework for achieving high-quality transboundary cooperation, serving as a roadmap for Protected Areas to build impactful and sustainable partnerships. They outline practical steps and criteria designed to ensure that collaboration is effective, measurable, and long-lasting. Further details on each component of these standards are presented in the following sections of this document, where we will examine them individually and in greater depth.

## 3. PRIMARY CRITERIA

### 3.1 Vision

The first component of the Primary Criterion is vision. In addition to the individual vision for each Protected Area, the management bodies of a future EUROPARC Transboundary Area must develop a shared, long-term vision. This vision should reflect the collaborative goals and aspirations of all partner Protected Areas, underscoring the mutual benefits of their transboundary cooperation. It should articulate the broader environmental, cultural, and socio-economic gains that the partnership will bring to the region.

**Indicators:**

- A clear and joint long-term vision has been established, outlining the benefits of the transboundary Protected Area, and is endorsed by all partners.
- The vision includes specific references to the environmental state, particularly the natural and cultural resources, biodiversity, and the socio-economic wellbeing of local communities.

### 3.2 Harmonisation of Management Plans

The second Primary Criterion is the harmonisation of management plans across the Protected Areas involved. The cooperation should be structured around jointly agreed management frameworks, with individual management plans adapted to align with transboundary goals. These plans should be part of a mid-term (3–5 years) work plan, and include objectives related to conservation, capacity building, and the training of staff across the partner areas.

**Indicators:**

- A jointly developed and agreed mid-term work plan or complementary documents exist, addressing the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, biodiversity, and the promotion of local communities' socio-economic wellbeing through sustainable initiatives.
- At least two Secondary Fields of Work have been identified, and active efforts are being made to achieve objectives in these areas.

### 3.3 Official Agreement

For successful transboundary cooperation, the third Primary Criterion requires the establishment of a formal official agreement. This agreement should be made at the appropriate management and political levels and serve as the foundation for the creation and ongoing development of the EUROPARC Transboundary Area. When necessary, bilateral and multilateral agreements, as well as relevant international conventions, should be used to provide the legal and procedural framework for cooperation.


**Indicators:**

- The responsible authorities at both the Protected Areas and relevant higher administrative levels have signed an official agreement to formalise cooperation.
- The agreement specifies a long-term validity (approximately 10 years).
- The agreement is in line with international treaties and national conservation programs, ensuring compliance with relevant environmental and legal frameworks.

### 3.4 Staff Involvement

Effective staff involvement is the fourth essential criterion for sustained and dynamic cooperation. It is important to establish continuous communication across all staff levels and identify facilitators who will oversee the collaborative process. Regular meetings and joint field trips between staff members from all partner Protected Areas should be planned to facilitate project management, evaluate progress, and promote mutual knowledge exchange. Establishing a joint steering committee is strongly recommended to guide and oversee cooperation.

**Indicators:**

- Each partner Protected Area has designated at least one staff member responsible for facilitating transboundary cooperation.
  - At least one staff member from each Protected Area has the opportunity to participate in the governing bodies of the other partner(s), particularly when decisions are made that affect their area.
  - Regular meetings are held among staff members responsible for cooperation, providing a platform to discuss, plan, and evaluate joint actions, and to share knowledge and best practices. These meetings are crucial for maintaining momentum and ensuring the project's success.
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### 3.5 Stakeholder Involvement

The fifth Primary Criterion emphasises the importance of raising local awareness about the newly established transboundary area and its objectives. Successful cooperation goes beyond the management of Protected Areas and requires active involvement from local stakeholders, including community members and business owners. Engaging these groups in the development process fosters mutual understanding and positive attitudes between park authorities and stakeholders. Regular engagement, such as meetings, joint discussions, and cooperative activities, is essential to build strong, collaborative relationships.

#### Indicators:

- The common vision of the partner Protected Areas is widely recognised and supported by local stakeholders, ensuring a shared commitment to the area's goals.
- Each partner Protected Area has designated at least one staff member as the primary contact for local stakeholders, whose role is to strengthen relationships with communities and business owners.
- Regular meetings take place between park management and local stakeholders, focusing on discussing, planning, and evaluating joint initiatives. These meetings help maintain open lines of communication and foster collaboration.
- Local communities and businesses actively support the work of the Protected Areas by participating in joint project development or by engaging in initiatives such as visitor centre development and other collaborative efforts.



TransParcNet 2024.



TransParcNet 2024.



# Primary Criteria

**Vision**

**Harmonisation of Management Plans**

**Official Agreement**

**Staff involvement**

**Stakeholder involvement**

Primary Criteria.

## 4. SECONDARY CRITERIA

### 4.1 Guiding Rules for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution

The first Secondary Criterion stresses the importance of establishing and implementing clear rules for cooperation. These rules should promote transparent communication, joint decision-making, and effective conflict resolution. They must consider the working methods, cultural differences, administrative structures, and decision-making processes of each partner. The goal is to ensure smooth cooperation and resolve any conflicts that arise fairly.

**Indicators:**

- Cooperation rules are established, creating an environment where fair and balanced decision-making is ensured.
- Information exchange rules are in place to facilitate continuous communication, and regular meetings are scheduled.
- Conflict resolution standards are defined, with mediators identified for managing disputes effectively.
- All meetings are documented, and meeting records are made available to all partners to ensure transparency and accountability.

### 4.2 Exchange of Information

The ongoing exchange of information between partners on the natural, historical, and cultural aspects of the transboundary area is the next Secondary Criterion for effective collaboration and decision-making. Partners should share relevant documents, literature, and research results to ensure that all parties have the necessary information for planning and management.

**Indicators:**

- Partners regularly exchange general documents, research findings, databases, and literature related to the area's natural, historical, and cultural heritage.
- Relevant planning and management documents are exchanged or made accessible to all partner Protected Areas to ensure alignment and coordination.

### 4.3 Foreign Language Communication

Next on the list of Secondary Criteria is the effective foreign language communication, which is crucial for smooth transboundary cooperation, particularly when different partners speak different languages. Clear translation arrangements and a shared understanding of technical and scientific terminology are essential to avoid miscommunication and ensure that all partners are on the same page.

**Indicators:**

- A mutually understood language is used at all official meetings, ensuring smooth communication.
- Key documents are translated into the languages of all partners, ensuring that everyone has access to important information in their native language.
- A shared terminology for technical and scientific terms has been agreed upon to prevent misunderstandings in the planning and management of the transboundary area.

### 4.4 Basis of financing

The financing of joint transboundary projects should be secured. Project proposals for international funding are to be jointly prepared and submitted. The use of funding from international programmes e.g. EU, GEF is to be mutually agreed.

**Indicators**

- Each partner has secured a budget for transfrontier cooperation in the mid-term perspective (3-5 years).
- Partner protected areas cooperate in fundraising for joint transfrontier activities and projects.
- Transparent financial reporting mechanisms are established and shared between partners.
- Partners actively exchange knowledge and build capacity related to grant writing and financial management.



# Secondary Criteria

**Guiding Rules for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution**

**Exchange of Information**

**Foreign Language Communication**

**Basis of financing**

Secondary Criteria.



## 5. PRIMARY FIELD OF WORK

### 5.1 Nature and Landscape Conservation

In the primary field of work, there is only one essential element – joint nature and landscape conservation activities. Such activities should ideally align with the principles of the **IUCN Protected Area Management Categories**, focusing on practical, collaborative efforts to conserve the region's biodiversity and ecosystems. However, it is recognised that in some countries, protected area authorities may not formally follow the IUCN framework, even though their conservation work is of a high standard. Therefore, this criterion encourages alignment with IUCN principles where feasible, without penalising areas for structural limitations.

This includes initiatives such as establishing interconnected habitats, implementing management plans, and conducting biodiversity conservation and habitat restoration projects.

#### **Indicators:**

- A joint zonation system that supports nature and landscape conservation goals is established and operational.
- Conservation management objectives are, where possible, aligned with the IUCN Protected Area Management Categories.
- Migration routes for species and natural evolutionary processes across borders are unimpeded.
- Joint conservation activities and programmes focused on species and habitat protection are actively implemented.
- Cross-border hazards (e.g., natural disasters or environmental threats) are identified and cooperation exists to control these hazards effectively.

## Primary Field of Work

### Nature and Landscape Conservation

## 6. SECONDARY FIELDS OF WORK

### 6.1 Environmental Education and Communication

The first Secondary Field of Work requires a range of educational and communication activities aimed at raising awareness and promoting the significance of the transboundary Protected Area. Joint efforts in developing a common identity, multilingual publications, guided visits, and cooperation with the media are essential in conveying the message of the transboundary area to diverse audiences. A cross-border system of ranger services and multilingual visitor centres should also be established.

#### **Indicators:**

- At least one joint bi- or multilingual medium (e.g., publication, website, video) exists to communicate the message of the transboundary Protected Area.
- Regular bi- or multilingual guided visits for both school and non-school education take place across the border.
- A cross-border ranger service or nature guide service is established or under development.
- Bi- or multilingual visitor centres are implemented to cater to the informational and educational needs of both tourists and locals.
- Active communication channels exist for ongoing information exchange between local communities, stakeholders, and Protected Area partners.

### 6.2 Recreation and Sustainable Tourism

Next Secondary Field of Work indicates, that transboundary cooperation should promote sustainable tourism and provide opportunities for visitors to experience nature and enjoy the landscape. This includes developing visitor management systems, visitor facilities, trails, and cross-border public transport. Sustainable tourism initiatives should also contribute to regional development, including the marketing of local ecological products. Protected Areas with a strong tourism focus may also consider pursuing certification under the EUROPARC European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas.

#### **Indicators:**

- At least one cross-border initiative exists that promotes sustainable tourism as a means of fostering regional development.
- A bi- or multilingual cross-border visitor facility or trail is established to enhance the visitor experience.

## 6.3 Research and Monitoring

The third Secondary Field of Work states that partners should collaborate in the development and implementation of common research and monitoring programmes, ensuring that nature conservation efforts and other transboundary initiatives are informed by continuous and joint monitoring of shared ecosystems. Partnerships with research facilities, universities, and other stakeholders can enhance these efforts.

### **Indicators:**

- Mutually agreed research in ecological, cultural, or economic fields is being continuously applied.
- Joint monitoring activities are regularly conducted, with results shared among all involved partners.
- At least one example demonstrates that joint monitoring of shared ecosystems is actively taking place.
- Evidence exists of the practical application of results from joint monitoring to inform conservation and management decisions.
- Transboundary cooperation provides a platform for exchanging knowledge and expertise between scientists and experts involved in research and monitoring.

## 6.4 Mutual Understanding

To foster trust and communication between neighbouring communities, the fourth Secondary Field of Work indicates that the partners should support activities that promote cultural understanding. Joint events and cultural exchanges play an essential role in building relationships and cooperation between local communities across borders.

### **Indicators:**

- Regular joint cultural events (e.g. festivals, exhibitions, or heritage days) are organised and involve community members from both sides of the border.
- Educational or awareness-raising activities that highlight shared cultural or historical heritage are developed and implemented jointly.
- Cross-border exchange programmes for youth, schools, or local organisations are established and maintained.
- Communication materials (e.g. brochures, websites, social media content) are produced in multiple local languages and reflect cultural diversity.

- Mechanisms (e.g. joint committees or working groups) exist to engage local communities in planning and delivering cultural cooperation initiatives.
- Evidence of increased local participation in cross-border cultural activities is documented and monitored.

## Secondary Fields of Work

**Environmental Education and Communication**

**Recreation and Sustainable Tourism**

**Research and Monitoring**

**Mutual Understanding**

Secondary Fields of Work.





## 7. BECOMING A EUROPARC TRANSBOUNDARY AREA

The journey to becoming a certified EUROPARC Transboundary Area involves a clear, step-by-step process designed to ensure that all participating Protected Areas meet the high standards required for effective cross-border cooperation. This section outlines the necessary steps to guide applicants through the process efficiently and effectively.

### 7.1 Steps to take

#### Step 1. Understand the Process and Requirements

After registering and paying registration fee, you'll receive the **Guidelines** and **Application form**. Take time to read through them carefully, especially the **Basic Standards**, which form the foundation of your application. If anything is unclear, the EUROPARC team is here to support you.

#### Step 2. Prepare for Certification

Ensure your protected areas meet the Basic Standards:

- Fulfil **all 5** Primary Criteria
- **At least 2** out of 4 Secondary Criteria
- The Primary Field of Work
- **At least 2** out of 4 Secondary Fields of Work

Start assessing your cooperation efforts early to give your team ample time to align with the requirements.

#### Step 3. Complete and Submit Your Application Package

Work together with your partners to complete the **Application Form** (3 sections: Partner Details, Cooperation, Self-Assessment) and gather all **supporting documents** that prove your joint efforts. Send your full application electronically to: ✉ [europarc@europarc.org](mailto:europarc@europarc.org). You'll then receive an invoice for the **verification fee**.

## Step 4. Undergo Evaluation

The evaluation includes:

- A **Desk Review** of your documents.
- An **On-Site Visit** (2–3 days) by a verifier to meet your team and observe cooperation in action.
- You'll organise and host this visit, **covering the verifier's in-country travel and accommodation**.

## 5. Receive Certification and Stay Engaged

If successful, you'll be awarded the **EUROPARC Transboundary Certificate**, valid for **5 years** and presented at the EUROPARC Conference.

After then, you will get an exclusive chance to join the **TransParcNet** community to stay connected, participate in events, share experiences, and grow your cooperation with other certified areas.

## CONCLUSION

The EUROPARC Transboundary Certificate is a **mark of excellence** in cross-border environmental stewardship. Protected Areas achieve this prestigious recognition by meeting rigorous standards for **conservation, collaboration, and sustainable management**.

Guided by measurable criteria, the certification promotes **shared visions, stakeholder engagement, and joint initiatives** that benefit both nature and local communities. The five-year re-evaluation process ensures continuous improvement and adaptability, keeping cooperation effective and relevant.

This certificate symbolises lasting partnerships, protecting natural and cultural heritage while driving conservation and regional growth.



# Transboundary Parks

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