



**EUROPARC Federation
Report to Council
28th September 2014**

Title:
EUROPARC Consulting report

Summary:
Update to September 2014

An overview of
EUROPARC Consulting activities since October 2013

Recommendations:
❖ To note the report

1 Our year, our work

On the positive side...

EUROPARC Consulting has been successfully working in many countries with members of the EUROPARC Federation over the past twelve years. We have built a wide and skilled pool of experts with knowledge of all parts of protected-area work. Over the last 12 months we have carried out a number of excellent projects in different parts of Europe and have also been involved in a record number of Expressions of Interest and Calls for Tenders. We are currently waiting for news on some very exciting applications that were submitted earlier this year.

Also over the past year we have continued to raise our profile and visibility to promote what we can do to help the Federation's Members and others do an even better job – from research and analysis to preparing EU funding applications and from training and skill development to practical solutions in conservation, recreation and tourism.

In addition to our Facebook page, website, regular articles, attendance at international events and via the online-network LinkedIn we have developed closer relations with colleagues in the EUROPARC network and a partnership with the European Platform for Business and Biodiversity also improved Consulting's profile.

The last 12 months have been the most challenging since 2007. The financial climate is tough, competition is fiercer than ever, our margins slimmer than before whilst expenses increase. However, by improving our profile, sharpening up our tendering process and cutting expenditure we have still been able to support the Federation:

- In 2013 we contributed €20,000 to the Federation budget.
- As a result of Consulting's work we have been able to transfer over €140,000 to Federation funds since 2008.

On the more negative side...

Since the beginning of 2014-we have further increased the rate of tendering but the conversion rate of tenders into contracts has dropped markedly which is causing concern.

One of the reasons is the fierce competition in the 20,000 to 40,000 € range for the type and level of work we are tendering for. Tendering for contracts below 20,000 € means competing against sole traders who often charge very low rates. Even then we have to find the means of pre-financing shortlist-interview travel which can cost more than the surplus generated by a contract.

Also there is increased competition within the EUROPARC family between us and the Sections or even the EUROPARC Federation. Additionally, the changes in the Charter process, a deficit in last year's annual accounts and a much reduced cash flow all hinder our ability to tender for certain work.

That leaves the larger and labour-intensive tenders above 40,000 € which require us to pre-finance such work. Since EUROPARC Consulting does not currently have that kind of cash flow we are now reliant to work with other partners to provide that cash flow. We have recently submitted two large tenders, one for around 145,000 € for sustainable tourism in Cyprus, and another one for the European Commission for around 250,000 €.

Seeking solutions

Our main efforts are now concentrated on building up our cash reserves to a more sustainable level and finding a solution to the competition problem within the EUROPARC family. As the Internal Auditor pointed out at the previous Council meeting in Ay, France, it should be remembered when looking for projects, that *“EUROPARC Consulting could take on these jobs as it would make accounting clearer and not reduce the Federation NGO grant. ... The question should always be who can do things best and who brings most benefit to the Federation in the long-term.”* There needs to be a much clearer distinction of “who does what” within the EUROPARC family. That would avoid the embarrassing situations which arise when EUROPARC Consulting tenders compete with those of the Sections or the Federation itself.

To help this, an excellent start has been made with the emerging EUROPARC Federation draft Strategy. EUROPARC Consulting supports the broad role within the EUROPARC family we would like to have and together provide a positive future for both the Federation and Consulting.

We understand that the draft Strategy would see Consulting promote “the products and services of the Federation through consulting business using the expertise of the technical network”. If adopted, the Strategy would support us in developing “project proposals that meet mission and strategy of the Federation in cooperation with the EUROPARC Directorate, Sections and members”, provide “services and consultancy to EUROPARC Federation members on request” as well as “services and consultancy to non-EUROPARC Federation members building on the expertise of the network” and would give us a role in identifying and developing “capacity and capability within EUROPARC”.

We shall continue our work and see the company exploring different fields of work in protected-area management and enable it to expand its geographical reach. We will continue to provide as much financial support as is compatible with our commercial viability.

2 Some examples of our work and our clients over the past year

➤ Reaching across the Channel International COOL tourism project

At the end of December 2013 EUROPARC Consulting completed its work on the COOL Tourism Project, an INTERREG programme to develop and promote the tourism offer in rural areas of the Cross-Channel region in France and the UK.

As we reported last year, this European partnership of eleven local authorities and organisations in the east and south of England, and in the north-west of France, was based on the original idea for a rural

tourism project by Visit Kent and Pas de Calais Tourism. It is being delivered with the support of the European cross-border co-operation Programme INTERREG IV A, France (Channel) – England, co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund.

The project looked at opportunities to grow the rural tourism sector and identify obstacles and challenges. With its report EUROPARC Consulting will have helped to create low impact, environmentally-friendly sustainable tourism that cherishes, not destroys, and builds environmental awareness, whilst taking into account the needs of the environment, local residents, businesses and visitors.

The project brought together staff teams with diverse skill-sets including tourism and marketing, countryside management, heritage and cultural management, community working and healthy living. It brought in outside know-how from researchers and technical experts who are on the large EUROPARC Consulting panel.



Two EUROPARC Consulting experts in front of Blickling Hall, Norfolk (UK), venue for one of the COOL workshops (photo: J. Decuignières)

For this project EUROPARC Consulting was contracted to undertake crucial research, on behalf of the partnership, that will form the foundation for the success of the subsequent project activities. From this research and partnership working groups, the partners want to develop a common methodology that will eventually find its way into a COOL business toolkit.

➤ **Dinaric Arc Parks and Sustainable Tourism – Conference in Montenegro**

One of the highlights of current EUROPARC Consulting work is the WWF Mediterranean Programme’s Dinaric Arc Parks project. It has enabled EUROPARC Consulting to reach out to around 75 protected

areas in the region that stretches through Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo under UNSCR 1244, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia.

One of our aims is to persuade as many protected areas in this region as possible to become, first of all, members of the EUROPARC Federation and then aim for European Charter status. We are happy to report that the first batch has already joined the EUROPARC Federation. A number of them are also Charter candidates.

As part of the same programme, our Managing Director Wilf Fenten gave a keynote presentation at the 2nd Dinaric Arc Parks Conference in Budva, Montenegro, at the end of last year. In addition, we were able to provide expert support for workshops at the Conference.



Wilf Fenten at the Dinaric Arc Parks Conference in Montenegro

➤ **Pennine Peat Partnership
Preparing a LIFE application**

Large-scale grant applications for major projects such as LIFE, ERASMUS or INTERREG can be a major headache, particularly when many partners are involved. A flexible, experienced and enthusiastic organisation like EUROPARC Consulting can take the sting out of this work and use its network of experts to provide just the right assistance.

The Pennine Peat Partnership in Northern England consists of a large group of partners and is looking for significant funding for a 5-year large-scale restoration and awareness programme running from July 2015 to June 2020. It is working towards for EU LIFE funding and has asked EUROPARC Consulting to prepare the application as the company knows how these are put together and assessed.

In order to draw on maximum support from all partners we have already begun a programme of workshops and set up a log frame to ensure a logical development of the application.

If the LIFE application is successful it will result in a magnificent programme leading to the restorations of approximately 10000 ha of eroding peatland in the UK's northern Pennines (North Pennines AONB, Northumberland National Park, Kielder Forest) and the southern Pennines (Yorkshire Dales National Park (including proposed extension), Forest of Bowland, west Pennine moors) focusing on restoration and creation of functioning peat bogs using novel surface re-vegetation techniques.



Current efforts to conserve and enhance the carbon-sink properties of the UK's northern peatlands are not sufficient (photo: North Pennine AONB)

➤ **A visitor management plan for a national park honeypot
Yorkshire Dales National Park (UK)**

Most national parks and other protected areas often struggle hard to protect the precious natural and cultural heritage in their area from too many visitors. One of England's most



The magnificent 19th railway viaduct looks remote but has become a major visitor honeypot (photo: Hilary Fenten)

picturesque railway lines cuts right across the Yorkshire Dales National Park. The railway line boasts some magnificent 19th century railway viaducts which have become a real honeypot for visitors.

One of them is the Ribblesdale Viaduct in Ribblesdale, right in one of the most sensitive areas of wild moorland in the Yorkshire Dales National Park. As part of a major grant application, the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust has asked EUROPARC Consulting to develop a fully costed visitor management plan for its grant application so that between 2015 and 2017 many major improvements can be accomplished.

In our recommendations we have placed practical and costed work over the next 3 years into the context of a vision for the next 10 years so that the work can continue after the current project has been completed.

➤ **European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (across Europe)**

Work with the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas also kept the team busy throughout the year. *Without the Charter work EUROPARC Consulting's cash flow situation would have been much worse.* In total 14 protected landscapes applied and 4 reapplied for Charter status. The verifiers have now submitted their reports and EUROPARC Consulting will shortly submit them to the EUROPARC Federation Evaluation Committee.

Later this year, again at a special ceremony like the one in Brussels last year, the EUROPARC Federation will hand over Charter certificates to all the protected areas whose application has been successful. Despite the many budget restraints facing protected areas they are still many of them committed to the Charter making it the Federation's best-known product.

Since the beginning of 2014 the latest changes in the management of the Charter process are in place and we have continued to work for the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas and promote excellence in all aspects of sustainable tourism.



One day or one week: our study visits, training seminars or learning workshops are great value - use us to learn the latest European innovations on Rangers, sustainable tourism, management plans, eco-system services and more...

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