

Being part of the EUROPARC Transboundary Parks Programme

The Transboundary Basic Standards and Verification Process

The Basic Standards

The Basic Standards Criteria are the centre of the evaluation process. They consist of **nine Quality Criteria and five Fields of Work** and **define a range of practical and measurable activities** that must be fulfilled in order for transboundary cooperation to be achieved and recognised. They foster an ecosystem perspective; champion the establishment of green corridors between habitats; promote cross-cultural interaction; support the social and economic well-being of local communities; and encourage parks to raise political support and to promote peace.

The Criteria are divided into **four groups**, Primary Criteria, Secondary Criteria, Primary Fields of Work and Secondary Fields of Work, and focus **on actions which enable transboundary cooperation to function well in practice**. These include the development of a common vision for the future of the transboundary area; the creation of official cooperation agreements and joint work plans; cooperation between staff of the areas on a number of levels; and the development of joint projects and funding arrangements for the transboundary work.

The **Primary Criteria** are indicators based on a common vision and workplan for the protected areas as well as an official agreement between the parks and cooperation between staff from each area.

The **Secondary Criteria** look at the establishment of guiding principles for the cooperation; the exchange of data; foreign language communication; and the basis of joint financing.

The **Primary Fields of Work** are indicators related to nature conservation, the main objective of a protected area, and the **Secondary Fields of Work** are indicators related to education and communication; recreation and sustainable tourism; research and monitoring; and mutual understanding.

Ten out of the fourteen Basic Standards must be achieved before certification can be obtained: all Primary Criteria and Primary Field of Work must be fulfilled. The protected areas must also demonstrate how they involve local communities in the transboundary cooperation and how the socio-cultural differences of the cooperating parties are acknowledged and respected.

A five step journey through the verification process

The verification and certification of transboundary protected areas according to the EUROPARC Basic Standards is currently the only method in Europe which analyses the progress of transboundary cooperation, identifies examples of good practice and encourages the exchange of experience and expertise in this field.

The verification procedure is based on a set of clear, universal criteria and indicators, the Basic Standards, which have been approved by the European Commission's DG Environment. The criteria guide protected areas through a structured analytical process which enables a thorough and transparent examination of their transboundary cooperation, towards certification. They are evaluated objectively by independent transboundary verifiers.

The procedure consists of five steps. To complete the process the parks need to be a member of the EUROPARC Federation and to contribute to the costs for the administration of the procedure.

Step 1 – Registration and Application

The first step is to complete the Registration Form provided on this website, send it to the EUROPARC Federation and transfer the registration fee.

As soon as we register your payment, you will receive the complete Application Form and a Manual that will help guide you through the whole process. Complete the application forms carefully and send them to our Headquarter.

We will examine your submitted documents thoroughly before the STEC (Steering and Evaluation Committee of the Transboundary Parks Programme) decides whether the application should proceed to the next level. At that point the payment of the application fee is due. It covers the administration of the whole process and the consultancy services provided by EUROPARC verifiers throughout the procedure.

Step 2 – Field evaluation mission

If the documents are complete and the application successful EUROPARC together with STEC appoints independent verifiers to evaluate the application. This involves a detailed analysis of the documents provided by the applicants and a thorough field (on-site) evaluation mission where the verifiers explore the cooperation within the parks and provide intermediate advice on the collaboration. Afterwards the verifiers provide the applicant authorities with expert recommendations about how they should further develop their cooperation and report the final outcomes of the evaluation to EUROPARC.

Each applicant transboundary area is evaluated by two verifiers. This ensures a high level of transparency throughout the process and thus guarantees the credibility of the final outcomes and recommendation. The verifiers are leading, internationally recognised European experts on transboundary protected area cooperation. They must have diplomatic and mediating skills and have some knowledge of the local political context because each verification is very specific.

Step 3 – Report assessment and final decision

During step three the verifiers' report on the outcomes of the field evaluation mission is examined by the STEC and recommendation on whether or not awarding the protected area with the Transboundary Certificate is given to the EUROPARC Council. The Council discusses the findings and has the final decision on honouring the park with the Certificate.

After the decision has been taken, EUROPARC will inform the protected areas about the outcomes of the evaluation. The parks also receive a copy of the final report with a list of expert recommendations on how they can further develop their cooperation. These are considered really beneficial by successful parks.

Step 4 – Certification

If applicant protected areas are successfully verified, their achievement is recognised by the EUROPARC Federation with the presentation of a certificate of excellence for transboundary cooperation. This certificate is awarded to the parks at EUROPARC's annual conference and is valid for an initial period of 5 years. The receipt of the EUROPARC transboundary certificate brings national and international recognition to the work of the recipient parks and gives new motivation for future work. It can also help raise the profile of the wider transboundary park region and project a positive image of the parks to both locals and visitors.

Step 5 – Periodic re-evaluation and extending the validity of the Certificate

If the certified protected areas wish to maintain the title of "EUROPARC Transboundary Area", a periodic re-evaluation of the cooperation takes place every 5 years. The re-evaluation provides the opportunity to monitor the progress made, to address possible difficulties or changes in circumstances that might have occurred since the first evaluation, and involved protected area administrations have the chance to get external advice for the further improvement of the transboundary cooperation.