

Evaluation of the Management Effectiveness of Germany's National Parks

Nationale
Naturlandschaften



Hainich National Park © Jens Fischer

LIFE PAME-Europe
Webinar 14 October 2026

Who are we?

Nationale Naturlandschaften e. V.

... is the German section of the EUROPARC Federation.

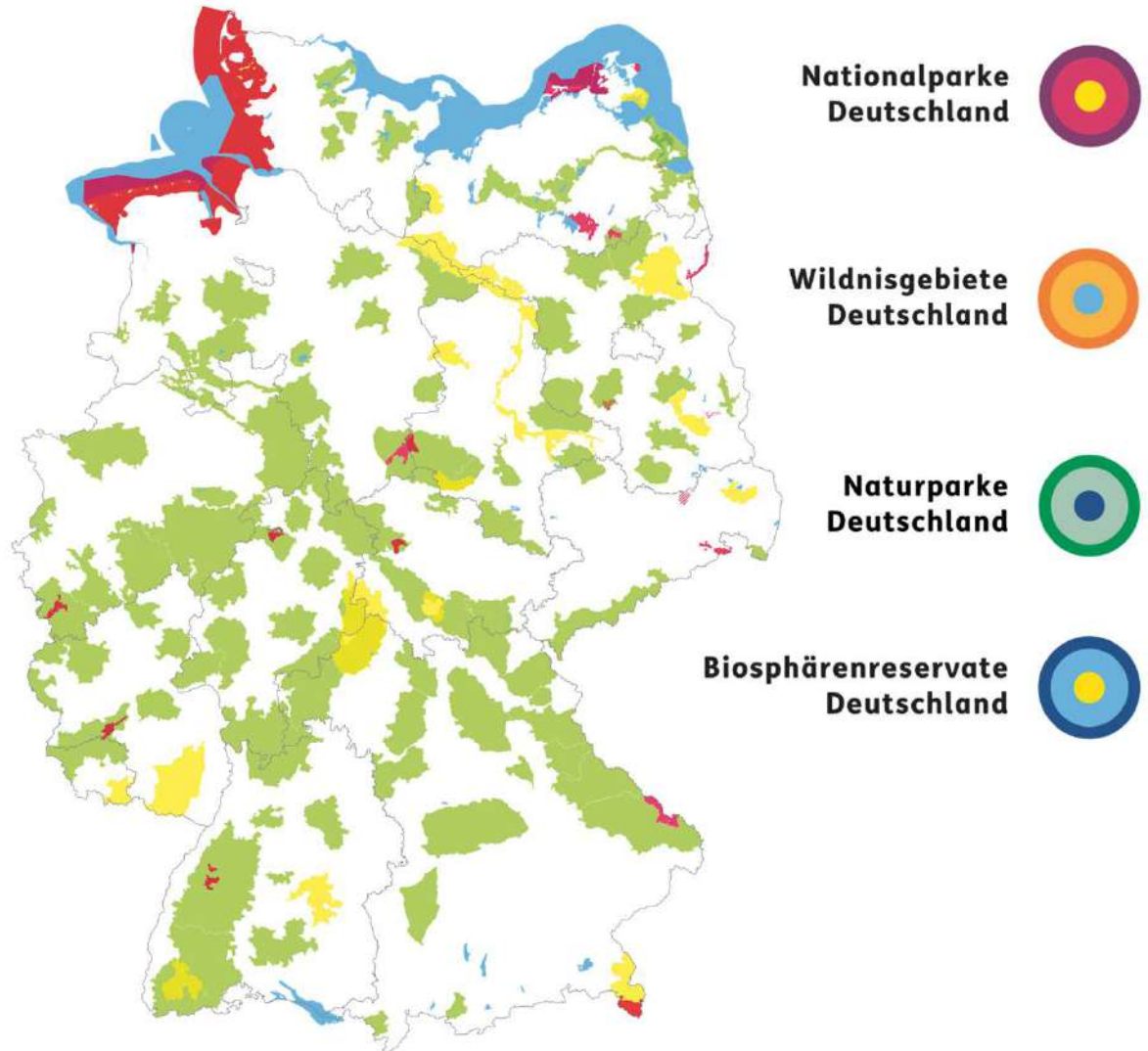
... is the umbrella organisation of all national parks, biosphere reserves and large wilderness areas.

Together with our partner, the Association of German Nature Parks („Verband deutscher Naturparke“), **we represent all larger protected areas covering a third of Germany's total area.**

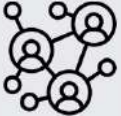
Umbrella brand „Nationale Naturlandschaften“

...are 143 protected landscapes that preserve and enhance the natural heritage for the benefit of people. These include:

- 16 National parks
- 18 Biosphere reserves
- 104 Nature parks
- 5 Wilderness areas



What we do?

 connecting our members	 advising and supporting the NNL on various matters	 training staff in the NNL	 publishing information material and specialist literature
 combining all activities on our website	 organising meetings and conferences in and for the NNL	 fundraising for the NNL	 developing and coordinating projects and programmes in and for the NNL
 lobbying for the interests of the NNL	 mediate between government, NGOs and society	Nationale Naturlandschaften  managing the umbrella brand "National Natural Landscapes"	 preparing expert reports, studies, analyses and surveys

A photograph of two young Great Gray Owls (Strix uralensis) perched on a tree branch. The owls have mottled brown and white feathers and large, dark eyes. They are surrounded by green foliage. A light green speech bubble is overlaid on the right side of the image.

**Let's take a
look at
Germany's
National
Parks**

National Parks in Germany

- 16 national parks
- Designated between 1970 and 2015
- Spread across all federal states
- Total area: 1.05 million hectares, of which 20% are terrestrial and 80% are marine
- 0.6% of Germany's overall terrestrial area are national parks



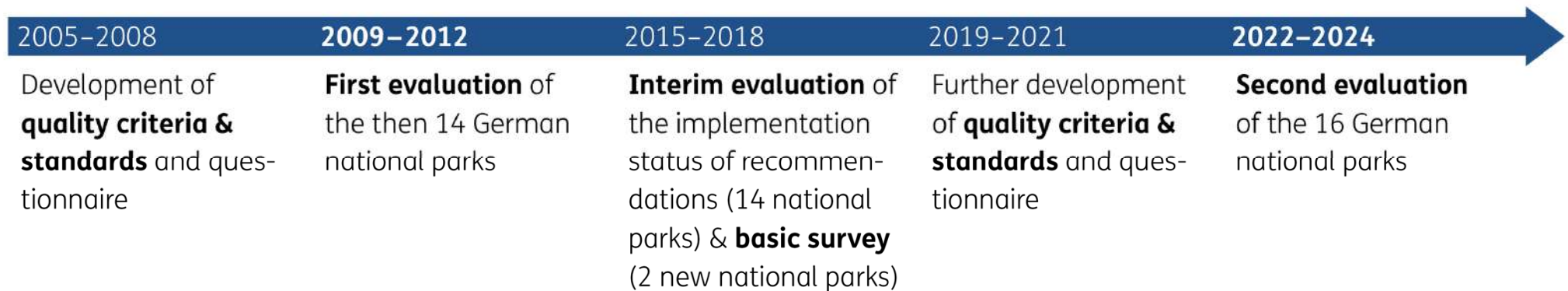


Evaluation Process & Methodology

Goals of the evaluation process are ...

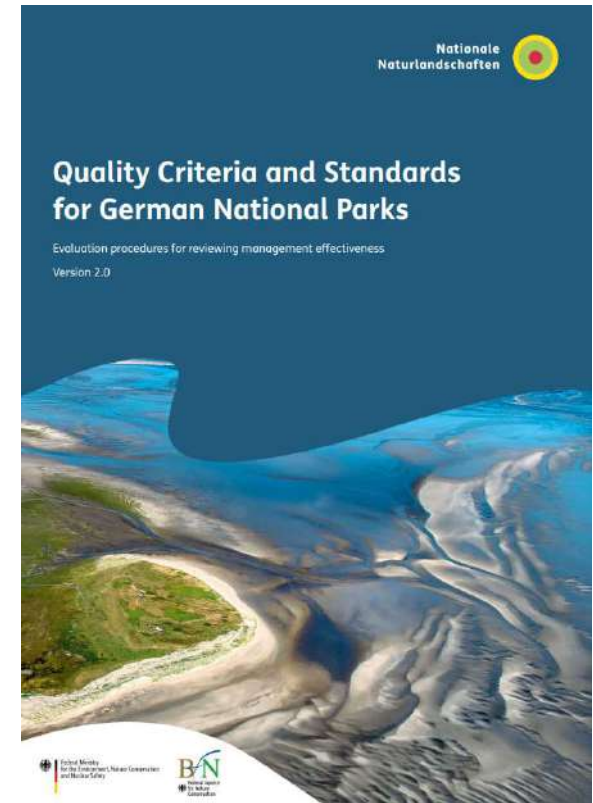
1. Identification of **strengths and weaknesses** and their causes in the national parks;
2. **Long-term maintenance** and, where necessary, **improvement** of the quality of park management by the national park administrations;
3. **Promotion of professional exchange** between the national park administrations across federal states;
4. Contribution to the **fulfilment of the obligations and commitments** of the Federal Republic of Germany under agreements within the framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity, including the implementation of the Programme of Work on Protected Areas (PoWPA), and Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), Target 3.

The Genesis of the German National Park Evaluation Process



Evaluation Methodology

- The German Inter-State Working Group for Nature Conservation (LANA) endorsed the development of quality criteria and standards for German national parks as a contribution to the implementation of the Programme of Work on Protected Areas (PoWPA) (first version from 2008).
- Data inventorying in 10 “activity areas” with a total of 44 quality criteria: Each standard describes a clearly defined target state to be achieved by the national park or the national park administration.
- Further development of the quality indicator set to specify some existing criteria and also include new(er) ones related to wilderness, sustainability, participation, and inclusion (second version from 2021).
- New quality indicators set: 8 activity areas with 42 quality criteria (changes still allow for comparability of results with the first evaluation), each with a standardised target description.



<https://nationale-naturlandschaften.de/umwelt-verstehen/materialien/quality-criteria-and-standards-for-german-national-parks-2/>

Evaluation Methodology

Activity area 1: Framework conditions

- 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

Activity area 2: Organisation

- 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

Activity area 3: Protection of natural biodiversity and dynamics

- 3.1 Space for natural dynamics
- 3.2 Zoning
- 3.3 Habitats of international importance
- 3.4 Ecosystem networking

Activity area 4: Management

- 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

Activity area 5: Cooperation and sustainable regional development

- 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

Activity area 6: External communication

- 6.1 Communication structure
- 6.2 Corporate design

Activity area 7: Education and nature experience

- 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

Activity area 8: Research and monitoring

- 8.1 Research content and research coordination
- 8.2 Monitoring
- 8.3 Documentation

Evaluation Methodology

- Data collection: based on a survey with open and closed questions, self-assessment of the national park administrations.
- All data collected in a database.
- Validation of data through site visits from an evaluation committee (EC), including interviews with the park administration and local stakeholders.
- EC compared target state of each quality criterion with the observed current situation to identify the corresponding strengths and weaknesses.
- Allowing for a comparison between the results of the first, the intermediate, and the second evaluation (long-term effects).

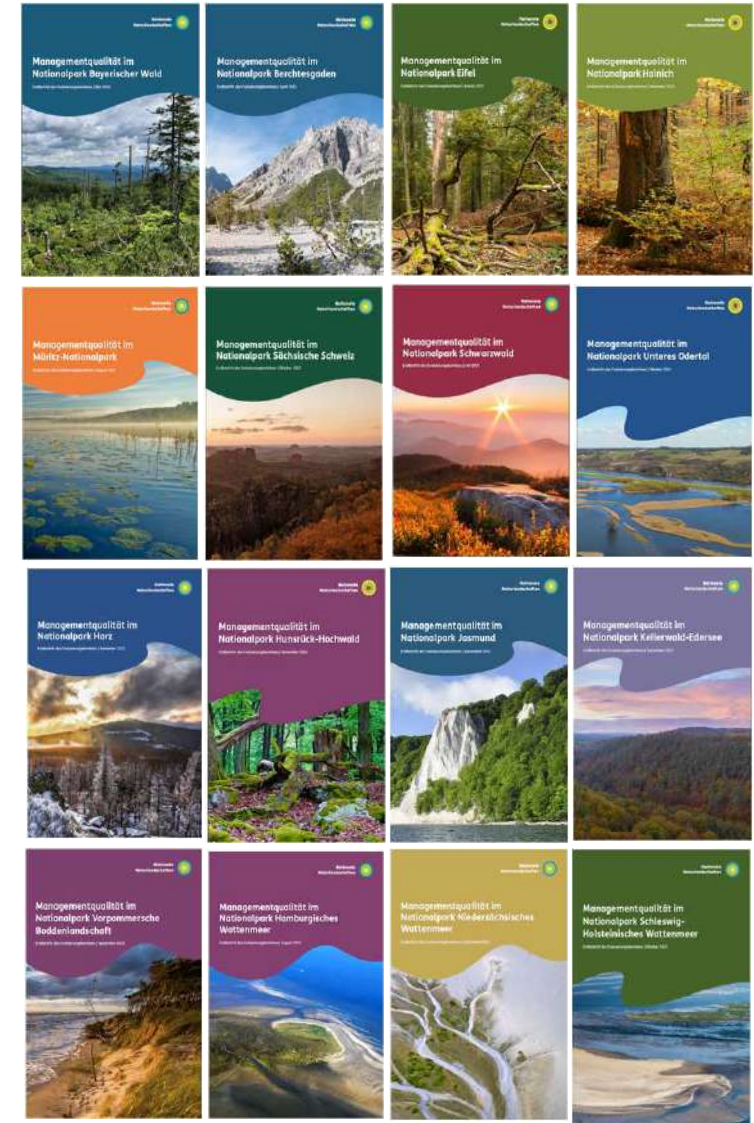


A photograph of a forest floor covered in moss and fallen leaves. A large tree trunk is covered in green moss and has several large, white, coral-like fungi growing on it. Smaller brown mushrooms are visible at the base of the tree. The background shows more trees and foliage.

Evaluation Results

Evaluation – Site-level Results

- Based on the identified strengths and weaknesses, the evaluation 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 a range from 24 to 66.
- Individual evaluation reports average around 60 pages and underwent extensive coordination processes between the involved parties (national park administrations were asked to review the reports for technical accuracy).
- Publication of site-level reports is at the discretion of the state ministry.



Evaluation – Cross-sectional Analysis

- gives a systematic overview about the key results of the site-level assessment in anonymised form.
- The goal of the cross-sectional analysis is not to rank or compare the national parks to one another on a uniform scale or to assess them, rather the goal is to determine the number of national parks that already meet the quality standards and to reflect the key strengths and weaknesses, together with changes compared with the first evaluation (2009 – 2012) and the central resulting recommendations for action identified during the second evaluation (2022 – 2024).



<https://nationale-naturlandschaften.de/umwelt-verstehen/materialien/management-quality-german-national-parks/>

Evaluation – Cross-sectional Analysis (Excerpt)

Activity area 1: Framework conditions

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

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

Evaluation – Cross-sectional Analysis (Excerpt)

Criterion 1.1: Legal foundations – Strengths and Weaknesses

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.

Evaluation – Cross-sectional Analysis (Excerpt)

Activity area 1: Framework conditions – Strengths and Weaknesses

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.

Evaluation – Cross-sectional Analysis (Excerpt)

Activity area 1: Framework conditions – Comparison and Key Recommendations

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.

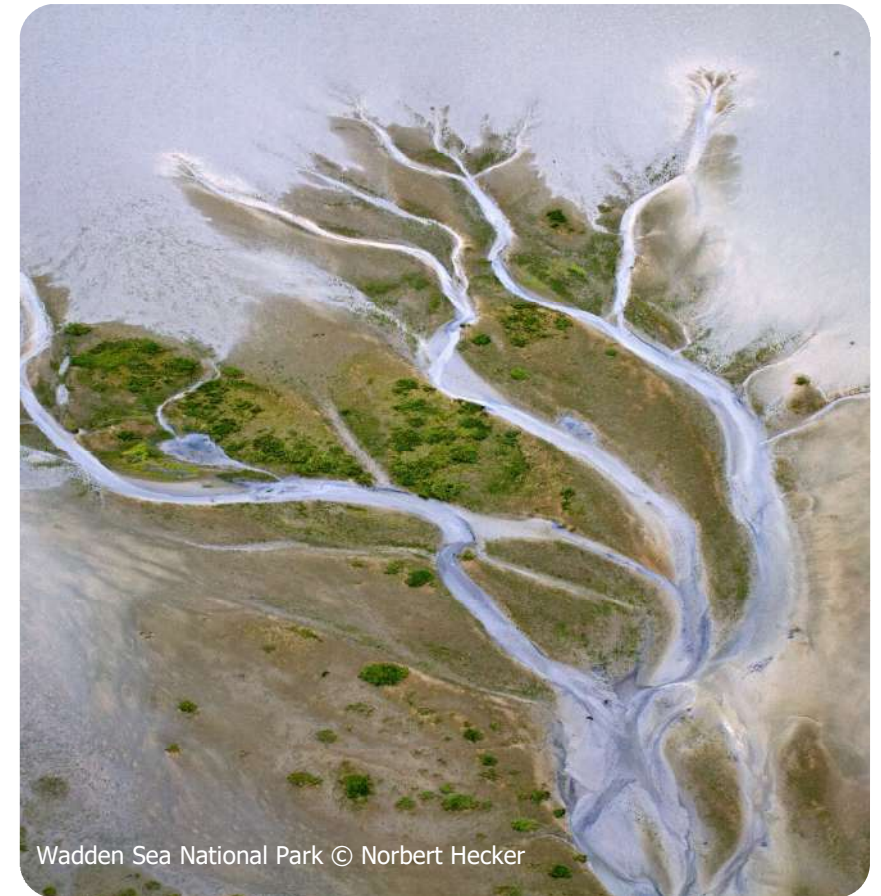
A specific threat to the fundamental conservation objectives arises in one national park from an international inland waterways agreement concluded in 2015, as a result of which significant changes to the ongoing dynamics of natural processes are to be expected.

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

Evaluation Results: Take-Home Messages

- The central management objective is to allow natural dynamic processes to occur across at least 75% of their area without direct human management or use (IUCN Category II) which still presents major challenges for many national parks.
- Human and financial resources are key success factors. All national park administrations have at least some staffing gaps in certain areas of responsibility, and in some cases, their financial and staffing levels can be described as wholly inadequate.



Wadden Sea National Park © Norbert Hecker

Benefits & Challenges

- Critical mirror/ analysis of the current situation, the strengths and weaknesses, as well as concrete recommendations for action
- Learning process
- Chance for participation & common understanding in the team
- Impartial assessment by external experts / coaching
- Political power / impetus for change
- Willingness to take an additional workload
- Consideration as a case study, particularly for system-level assessment within the LIFE PAME-Europe Project



Co-funded by the
European Union



LIFE PAME-Europe
Management Effectiveness
for Protected Areas in Europe



Funding

The project 'Evaluation of German National Parks' was funded by the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation with funding from the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety under grant reference number 3521810200.





Thank you very much
for your attention!

Contact:

Anja May

anja.may@nationale-naturlandschaften.de