Terms of Reference

EUROPARC Transboundary Protected Areas Working Group (2027–2028)

1. Purpose

The Transboundary Protected Areas Working Group supports the implementation of the EUROPARC Strategy 2030 by promoting cooperation between Protected Areas that share or neighbour international borders.

The Working Group provides strategic guidance for the development of the EUROPARC Transboundary Parks Programme, contributes to the review and development of its Standards and supporting guidance, facilitates knowledge exchange between practitioners, and promotes transboundary conservation as a tool for biodiversity protection, ecological connectivity and peaceful cooperation.

The Working Group also provides a mechanism for member participation in the development of the Transboundary Parks Programme, bringing the experience and perspectives of Protected Areas and transboundary practitioners into the programme's development and future direction.

2. Objectives

The Working Group will:

- provide strategic guidance for the Transboundary Parks Programme and contribute to its future development;
- contribute to the review and updating of the Transboundary Parks Programme and its 14 Basic Standards;
- strengthen cooperation between certified and prospective Transboundary Protected Areas;
- facilitate exchange of knowledge and good practice;
- support the visibility of transboundary cooperation within European conservation policy;
- identify opportunities for partnerships, projects and programme development;
- provide a platform for member participation and practitioner input into the development of the Programme.

3. Strategic Priorities (2027–2028)

Priority 1 – Modernise the Transboundary Parks Programme

Review and update the Transboundary Parks Programme and its 14 Basic Standards to reflect over 25 years of experience and emerging priorities, including nature restoration, climate change adaptation, ecological connectivity, digitalisation, stakeholder participation and evolving governance models.

The review should maintain a clear focus on the added value of **cross-border cooperation**. The Standards should therefore consider not only whether Protected

Areas address these issues individually, but also how cooperation across the border contributes additional conservation, management and societal benefits.

Priority Champion: [to be appointed]

Supporting Members: [to be appointed]

Priority 2 – Expand the Programme

Support the expansion of the Transboundary Parks Programme, particularly in the Western Balkans and other underrepresented regions, through outreach, programme promotion and engagement with Protected Areas and national authorities.

Expansion will continue independently of project funding while additional funding opportunities are pursued.

Priority Champion: [to be appointed]

Supporting Member: [to be appointed]

Priority 3 – Strengthen the Community of Practice

Promote peer learning, exchange of experience and collaboration between existing and prospective Transboundary Parks, while identifying future policy and project opportunities that strengthen transboundary conservation across Europe.

Priority Champion: [to be appointed]

Supporting Member: [to be appointed]

4. Governance, Roles and Responsibilities

The Transboundary Parks Programme operates through complementary roles and responsibilities, ensuring a clear distinction between programme development, knowledge exchange, independent assessment, quality control and formal decision-making.

Working Group

The Transboundary Protected Areas Working Group provides strategic input to the development and future direction of the Transboundary Parks Programme. It contributes to the review and development of the Programme Standards and supporting guidance, supports outreach and programme development, and provides a mechanism for member participation and practitioner input.

The Working Group also strengthens the Transboundary community by facilitating exchange, identifying emerging needs and opportunities, and contributing to recommendations for the future development of the Programme.

TransParcNet

TransParcNet provides the wider community of certified and prospective Transboundary Protected Areas with a platform for exchange of experience, knowledge and good practice. The Working Group may use TransParcNet, consultations and thematic activities to seek wider input from the Transboundary community.

Verifiers

Independently assess individual Transboundary Protected Areas against the requirements of the Transboundary Parks Programme and prepare assessment reports and recommendations.

Steering and Evaluation Committee (STEC)

Provides a second level of technical quality control within the certification and re-evaluation process. STEC reviews verifier assessments and reports to promote consistency and quality across assessments and provides a recommendation regarding certification or re-evaluation.

EUROPARC Council

Makes the final formal decision on certification and re-evaluation, taking into account the technical assessment and recommendation provided through the certification process. The Council is not required to repeat the technical assessment carried out by the verifier and reviewed by STEC.

EUROPARC Directorate

Coordinates and administers the overall Transboundary Parks Programme and provides the organisational, financial, administrative and communication support required for its implementation.

Directorate Liaison

Serves as the link between the Working Group and the EUROPARC Directorate. The Directorate Liaison supports the effective functioning of the Working Group and ensures that its work is connected with the wider implementation and development of the Programme.

The Directorate Liaison will:

- support the development of the annual Working Group work plan in consultation with the Chair and Working Group members;
- help organise meetings and prepare agendas;
- facilitate communication between the Working Group and the Directorate;
- coordinate communications and follow-up actions;
- support document preparation and programme development;
- coordinate relevant outreach, reporting and administration; and
- ensure that Working Group recommendations and outputs are appropriately communicated within EUROPARC.

Working Group Composition

The Working Group will consist of **seven active members**:

- **one** Chair;
- **three** Priority Champions, one for each strategic priority; and

- **three** additional members providing relevant professional, geographical and Protected Area perspectives.

The composition should seek balanced representation of transboundary contexts, geographical regions, professional backgrounds and relevant areas of expertise.

The wider group of EUROPARC members and transboundary practitioners who are not part of the active Working Group will remain able to contribute through TransParcNet, consultations, thematic discussions and other Programme activities. Additional experts or representatives may be invited to participate in specific discussions where their expertise is relevant.

Working Group Chair

The Chair provides strategic leadership for the Working Group and will:

- coordinate the overall work of the Working Group;
- chair meetings and facilitate effective collaboration between members;
- coordinate the Priority Champions and ensure coherence between the three strategic priorities;
- guide discussions and build consensus;
- represent the Working Group within EUROPARC and externally, where appropriate; and
- report progress and recommendations to the EUROPARC Council.

The Chair does not serve as a Priority Champion, allowing the Chair to focus on the overall coordination and strategic direction of the Working Group.

Priority Champions

Each Priority Champion coordinates activities within their strategic priority, facilitates collaboration among the relevant members and provides progress updates during Working Group meetings.

Priority Champions work closely with the Chair and the Directorate Liaison to ensure that activities contribute to the overall objectives and annual work plan of the Working Group.

Working Group Members

Working Group members contribute their professional and practical experience to the work of the Group. They will:

- actively participate in meetings, consultations and collaborative work;
- contribute to the implementation of the strategic priorities;
- provide expertise and practical perspectives from their respective transboundary contexts;
- contribute to knowledge exchange and outreach within the wider Transboundary community; and

- support the development of recommendations and Programme outputs.

5. Working Methods

The Working Group will:

- meet online at least two times per year;
- aim to hold one in-person meeting annually, preferably alongside the TransParcNet Conference;
- work through electronic consultation and collaborative drafting between meetings;
- together with the Directorate Liaison, develop an annual work plan reflecting the strategic priorities of the Working Group and relevant EUROPARC organisational priorities;
- involve the wider Transboundary community through consultations, TransParcNet activities and thematic exchanges where appropriate;
- report annually to the EUROPARC Council.

6. Expected Outputs (2027–2028)

The Working Group will contribute to:

- revised Transboundary Parks Programme Standards and supporting guidance;
- recommendations for the future development of the Programme;
- recommendations and input to strengthen the governance and implementation of the Programme;
- annual progress reports to the EUROPARC Council;
- increased engagement with Protected Areas in the Western Balkans and other underrepresented regions;
- strengthened exchange of knowledge and good practice across the EUROPARC network;
- increased participation of members and practitioners in the development of the Transboundary Parks Programme;
- increased visibility of transboundary cooperation through EUROPARC communications and events.