

EWQA

Preliminary Report



Main Findings

January 2016

Introduction

The proposed wilderness is a large contiguous piece of Hohe Tauern NP. Most of the wilderness is located above the tree line. It consists of sparsely vegetated areas with rocks, boulders and moraine, extensive snowfields and glaciers. This is in stark contrast with the rich flowery alpine meadows, lush communities of tall herbs and dense alder and pine scrub, found in the lower sections.

Wilderness definition

The definition of wilderness to be applied to a verified wilderness was first formulated in 2005. Subsequently, it was passed onto the wilderness working group (WWG) of the Wild Europe Initiative to develop The Working Definition of European Wilderness and Wild Areas ¹⁾ (Wild Europe Initiative 2013).

This definition is used by the European Wilderness Initiative, the European Wilderness Society and was also adopted by the European Commission. The European Commission utilize it for the EC Guidance on Management of Wilderness and Wild Areas in the Natura 2000 Network (EC 2013) and in the EC Wilderness Register (2014). The logical next step was to use the wilderness definition as the basis to develop The European Wilderness Quality Standard and Audit System (EWQA).

European Wilderness Quality Standard and Audit System

The EWQA is a standardized wilderness norm that serves as a basis for effective wilderness protection, designation, restoration, and promotion of wilderness across a range of geographical and political regions in all European countries.

It provides an easily understood, unambiguous and straight forward wilderness benchmark system that can mobilize the necessary interest and support among practitioners across key sectors of society.

EWQA provides a common European wilderness certification standard which consists of principles, criteria and indicators which further specifies the quality aspects of wilderness.

The EWQA is based on over 500 indicators divided into nine principles and 72 criterions. Each wilderness area is assigned one of the four categories of the wilderness preservation system: bronze, silver, gold or platinum.

1) <http://wilderness-society.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/116693719-Definition-of-Wilderness-in-Europe-Draft.pdf>

The 9 EWQA principles

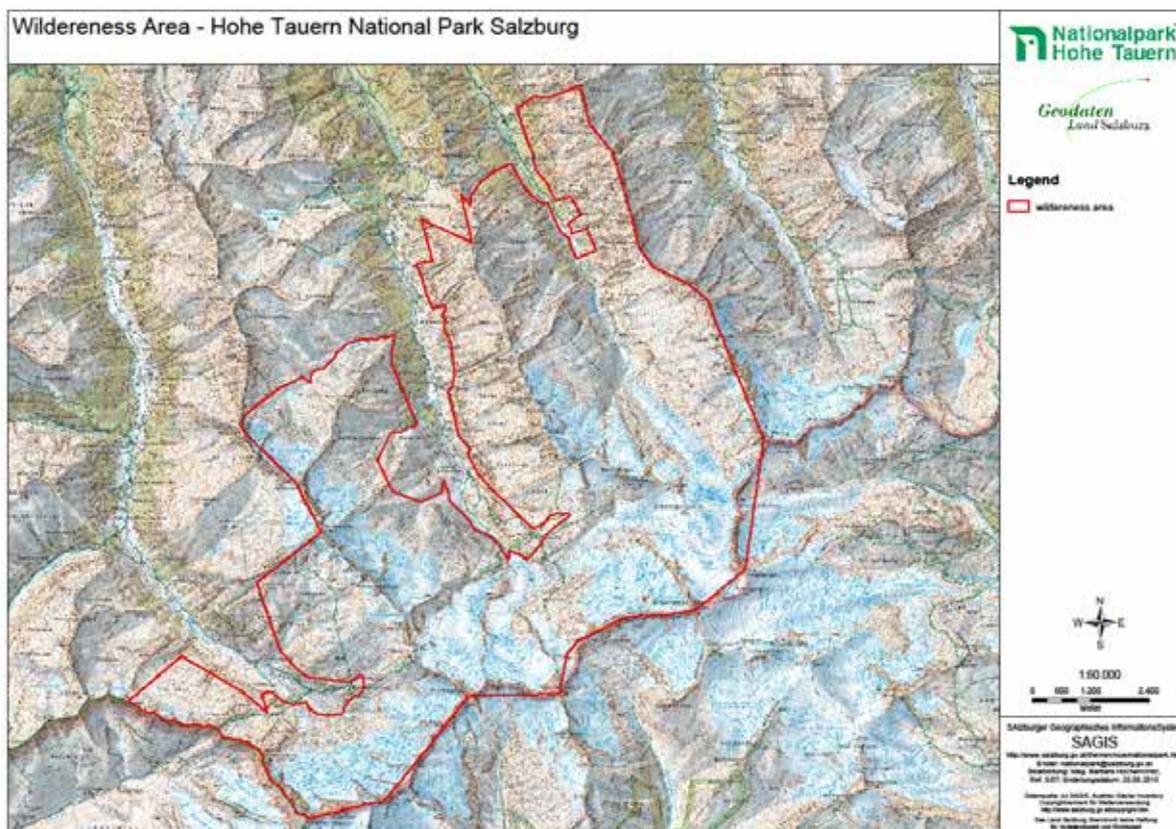
- **Wilderness Size and Zoning:** In general a wilderness should have the three above-mentioned zones. In cases where these cannot be implemented additional measures to ensure the protection and functioning of the wilderness zone must be implemented.
- **Natural processes and biodiversity:** In general a wilderness area should have a wilderness zone where natural processes maintain natural dynamics in biodiversity, contributes to the conservation of wilderness indicative species and contains examples of undisturbed ecosystems.
- **Wilderness Management Plan:** This plan encompasses the different Wilderness conservation measures, a biodiversity management plan, and a plan for supporting the natural processes, a landscape management and the training of the responsible wilderness management team. This principle also covers the impact of visitor management.
- **Wilderness Restoration:** In general a plan must be in place for all wilderness restoration zones to restore wilderness for later expansion of the wilderness zone.
- **Wilderness and Extractive Uses:** All levels of wilderness zones should not have any human extractive use or human intervention. For restoration purposes, some management interventions might still be permitted at the “Bronze- and Silver Standard”-levels especially, but only under very strict regulations and after close scrutiny of their necessity. Also covered under this principle are fire control, disease control, wildlife management and invasive species control.
- **Wilderness Disturbance:** Here the focus lies on the removal of infrastructure, well-planned tourism access and strictly regulated and limited road access to the area, in order to secure minimum impact on the wilderness zone.
- **Control strategy for fire, invasive species, natural catastrophes:** In general a wilderness should have a fire control plan, a disease control plan and an invasive species control plan. Here the focus lies on the wilderness zone without any active management measures to control fire, disease and an invasive species.
- **Wilderness Research and Monitoring:** Research and monitoring activities should generally be non-invasive in their character and observe minimum-intervention principles. This requests a detailed plan for scientific research and cooperation in cooperation with scientific institutions and universities regardless of the European Wilderness Quality Standard and Audit System level.
- **International Relevance:** The audit of the international relevance focuses mainly on the IUCN categories, Natura 2000 Network, UNESCO designations but also accepts others certifications.

The structure and content of EWQA covers a wide range of issues. These principles adequately reflect wilderness qualities as defined by EC (2013). The four qualities of wilderness are:

- **Undisturbedness** is reflected in the principles of wilderness disturbance and control strategies and wilderness management plan.
- **Undevelopedness** is reflected in the principles of wilderness disturbance.
- **Naturalness** is reflected in the principles of natural processes and biodiversity and wilderness and extractive uses.
- **Scale** is reflected in the principles of wilderness size and zoning.

In addition, EWQA includes principles of wilderness restoration, wilderness research and monitoring as well as international relevance.

Hohe Tauern Wilderness NP, Salzburg, Austria



Map 1: Hohe Tauern Wilderness, Salzburg, Austria © HTNP

Implementation of the European Wilderness Quality Standard and Audit System in Hohe Tauern Wilderness

EWQA and HTNP use their own zoning systems. EWQA zoning system is based on The Working Definition of European Wilderness and Wild Areas. HTNP zoning system is based on Austrian legislation. Table 1 shows how the two zoning systems can be combined.

	EWQA	Hohe Tauern NP	Compatibility between EWQS and HTNP zoning
Hohe Tauern Wilderness ²⁾	Wilderness zone ³⁾	HTNP Wilderness zone	Compatible
	Restoration zone ⁴⁾	-	There is no currently restoration zone in Hohe Tauern Wilderness
	Transitional zone ⁵⁾	HTNP Core and Buffer zone	Compatible. Hohe Tauern Wilderness is surrounded by HTNP Core and Buffer zone

Table 1: The different zoning systems

2) **Wilderness** can be categorised into three 'zones,' with a wilderness area surrounded by a restoration/zone of minimal activities, which in turn is surrounded by a transition zone. It is considered that this threefold structure offers best protection of key wilderness principles whilst allowing potential for future expansion and flexible interaction with other land uses. (Adopted according Definition of European Wilderness, 2013)

3) The **wilderness zone** would have the 'highest' quality of wilderness, with minimal impact of human activity or infrastructure and a dominance of natural processes. Where feasible, outward expansion would occur over time through restoration/rewilding into the restoration/zone – particularly if the wilderness zone is not large enough initially to allow complete ecological processes. (Adopted according Definition of European Wilderness, 2013)

4) The **restoration zone**, with relatively low impact of human presence, surrounds and protects the wilderness zone. Emphasis here should be on restoration/rewilding of natural habitats and processes, with phasing out of built structures and high impact activities within 10 years. Where feasible, there should be plans for it to be incorporated into the wilderness zone and expand outwards over time into the transition zone. (Adopted according Definition of European Wilderness, 2013)

5) The **transition zone** is an area where a range of human activities is permitted, but with management controls preventing development of major infrastructure, wind farms or large scale clear felling, that might significantly alter the landscape or natural environment. Sustainable harvesting is possible of timber, animals (hunting & fishing) and plants (berries, fruits, mushrooms), together with organic agriculture. (Adopted according Definition of European Wilderness, 2013)

Main Findings and Recommendations

Principle 1: Wilderness Size and Zoning

In general a wilderness area should have the three zones (wilderness, restoration and transition zones). In cases where these cannot be implemented additional measures to ensure the protection and functioning of the wilderness core zone must be implemented.

Recommendations	Priority			Time Frame
	Low	Medium	High	
Criterion 1.1. Wilderness has clearly defined boundary				
The boundaries of the wilderness zone are incorporated into the hiking maps and existing field information systems.		√		2020
Park management develops a project to better visualize the limits of the wilderness zone in the field.		√		2020
Park management improves the wilderness aspect of the communication strategy beyond the German-speaking audience.			√	2020
Criterion 1.2. Minimum size of the wilderness zone depending on the predominant habitat type				
Park management carries out an inventory for the potential enlargement of wilderness in protected area.		√		2020
Park management develops a map of the potential enlargement.		√		2020
Park management looks for funding and resources to enlarge the wilderness zone.		√		2020
Criterion 1.3. Wilderness has three zones, wilderness, restoration and transition, where further expansion of the area is planned and two zones, wilderness and transition, where restoration and/or expansion is completed.				
As mentioned above in Criterion 1.2.				

Principle 2: Natural processes and biodiversity

In general a wilderness area should have a wilderness zone where natural processes take place without the human intervention and the wilderness is in such a healthy state which it contributes to the conservation of threatened species for that region and contains examples of undisturbed ecosystem.

Recommendations	Priority			Time Frame
	Low	Medium	High	
Criterion 2.1. The wilderness zone follows natural processes to maintain natural dynamics in biodiversity.				
Park management develops a comprehensive management plan for the wilderness zone to maintain natural dynamics processes.			√	2018
The wilderness management plan creates a separate document or chapter of the overall management plan, with an English summary.		√		2018
Park management continues to communicate the importance of wilderness management to local stakeholders and visitors.			√	2020
Park management develops a more comprehensive strategy on how to effectively share wilderness management practices with an international audience (e.g. park managers, rangers, etc).	√			2020
Criterion 2.2. The wilderness zone contributes to the conservation of wilderness indicative species.				
Management plan should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information on endemic, red-listed, vulnerable and/or other rare species which occur in the wilderness. • Provide information on native species in the wilderness zone that have decreased or become extinct. • Provide actions steps on IAS/management. • Continue systematic monitoring of large herbivores with a focus on the wilderness zone. • English summary 			√	2018
Park management continues to implement a communication strategy that focuses on educating the public about wilderness, the importance of indicator species such as ibex, chamois or moderate forest operations and grazing and hunting activities around the wilderness zone.			√	2020
Continue monitoring for invasive species in wilderness.		√		2020

Recommendations	Priority			Time Frame
	Low	Medium	High	
Criterion 2.3. The wilderness zone contain examples of undisturbed ecosystems				
Park management continues on effective communication of wilderness conservation efforts in wilderness zone (highlight examples of undisturbed ecosystems) with a focus on local, national and international audience			√	2020
Park management develops a draft comprehensive study to achieve the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define the potential to enlarge the wilderness zone. • Prepare a map of proposed restoration zone. • Identify activities and steps to implement possible restoration measures (e.g. end grazing, find funding). 		√		2020

Principle 3: Wilderness Management

This principle addresses the different wilderness conservation measures; biodiversity management plan, plan for supporting the natural processes, and landscape management and the training of the wilderness management team. In addition, this principle covers the impact of visitor management.

Recommendations	Priority			Time Frame
	Low	Medium	High	
Criterion 3.1. The wilderness is protected by law in accordance with the respective national legislative framework for an indefinite period of time.				
Park management implements a long-term wilderness plan to guarantee legal protection of the wilderness zone (e.g. specific wilderness focus legislation, extent period of long-term agreement/lease with Austrian Forest Service for 30-35 years, etc.)			√	2020
Criterion 3.2. The wilderness has a WMP in place with duration of at least 10 years.				
Park management focuses on developing a new management plan and in particular section dealing with wilderness.			√	2017
Park management consider the possibility of enlarging the wilderness zone in the future. Develop a short inventory of wilderness potential in the area.	√			2020
Park management implements the new management plan which includes: wilderness education, interpretation and training which aimed towards visitors, local stakeholders and its own employees			√	2020
Park management communicates the benefit of wilderness conservation to increase the potential to assist other parks with wilderness conservation			√	2020
Park management develops an analysis of external and internal threats to the wilderness zone.			√	2020

Recommendations	Priority			Time Frame
	Low	Medium	High	
Criterion 3.3. The wilderness has a sufficiently large and well trained full time management team				
Considers idea to increase language skills of staff who are involved in tourism, visitor management, communication, interpretation, etc.	√			2020
Park management develops and implement wilderness focused education, interpretation training programs.			√	2020
Park management considers opportunity to train foreign experts on the subject of wilderness management and interpretation		√		2020
Criterion 3.4. A training plan for the management team exists.				
Park management develops a wilderness focused training plan for the management team.		√		2020

Principle 4: Wilderness Restoration

Wilderness restoration is an intentional activity that initiates or accelerates the recovery of damaged ecosystem with wilderness potential. The practice of wilderness restoration includes a wide scope of activities such as re-vegetation of disturbed areas, reintroduction of native species, as well as restoration of damaged habitat.

Recommendations	Priority			Time Frame
	Low	Medium	High	
Criterion 4.1. The wilderness has a long-term vision to enlarge the wilderness zone.				
Park management develops a brief report to assess the feasibility of enlarging the wilderness zone.	√			2020
Criterion 4.2. The wilderness has a wilderness restoration plan to enlarge and improve the wilderness zone.				
As mentioned above in Criterion 4.1.				

Principle 5: Wilderness and Extractive uses

Extractive use is one of the complex issues for wilderness conservation in Europe, however the working definition of wilderness stipulates that wilderness is an area without intrusive or extractive uses.

Recommendations	Priority			Time Frame
	Low	Medium	High	
Criterion 5.1. The wilderness zone has no extractive or commercial uses.				
Park management continues education and interpretation activities which focus on the impact of extractive uses (i.e. grazing, forestry and hunting) rewilding, spontaneous natural processes, and wilderness conservation.		√		2020
Criterion 5.2. The wilderness zone has no forestry operation.				
n/a				
Criterion 5.3. The wilderness zone has no hunting and/or game management interventions.				
Park management develops a strategy to communicate the importance of having a hunting-free zone in wilderness zone.		√		2020
Park management develops a scientifically sound roadmap for the restoration of both game migration routes and wintering grounds.		√		2020
Park management continues to its communication strategy of the importance of having carnivores in the wilderness zone.		√		2020
Criterion 5.4. The wilderness zone has no extractive fishing and no management interventions into fish populations.				
n/a				
Criterion 5.5. The wilderness has a fish and game mgmt plan for the restoration as well as the transition zone.				
Park management continues with game management in transition zone		√		2020

Recommendations	Priority			Time Frame
	Low	Medium	High	
Criterion 5.6. The wilderness zone has no active mining				
n/a				
Criterion 5.7. The wilderness zone has restored old mining sites				
n/a				
Criterion 5.8. Park management has implemented a restoration plan for old mining sites in the restoration zone				
n/a				
Criterion 5.9. The wilderness zone has no domestic livestock grazing.				
Park management continues its communication strategy for importance of having no livestock grazing in wilderness zone.		√		2020
Criterion 5.10. The wilderness zone has no agricultural activities				
n/a				
Criterion 5.11. The wilderness zone has no deadwood collection				
n/a				
Criterion 5.12. There is no commercial harvesting of berries, nuts or mushrooms in the wilderness zone				
n/a				
Criterion 5.13. There is no commercial collection of minerals in the wilderness zone				
Park management continues to monitor and control the collection of minerals in the wilderness zone.		√		2020
Criterion 5.14. There is no commercial use of wilderness zone for filmmaking				
n/a				

Principle 6: Wilderness Disturbance

Disturbances are essential element of wilderness management.

Recommendations	Priority			Time Frame
	Low	Medium	High	
Criterion 6.1. The wilderness zone has no permanent infrastructure				
Park management develops an impact study of two Alpenverein huts on the border of wilderness zone			√	2020
Criterion 6.2. The wilderness zone has no permanent settlements				
n/a				
Criterion 6.3. There is a management plan how to deal with temporary structures in the restoration zone				
Park management develops a map and inventory of the temporary structures (small scale tourism infrastructure) in the wilderness zone.		√		2020
Criteria 6.4. There is a management plan to deal with inherited settlements in the wilderness				
n/a				
Criterion 6.5. There is a management plan for the wilderness to deal with inherited indigenous gathering sites (e.g. traditional reindeer herding sites in Nordic countries)				
n/a				
Criterion 6.6. Permanent infrastructures in the restoration zone are removed according to the restoration plan. Unless the removal is detrimental to the quality of the wilderness				
n/a				
Criterion 6.7. There is a management plan to deal with archaeological remains in the wilderness zone				
n/a				
Criterion 6.8. There is no motorized transport in the wilderness.				
Park management develops an impact study of aviation (e.g. sightseeing by helicopter, drones, etc) in wilderness zone.			√	2020

Recommendations	Priority			Time Frame
	Low	Medium	High	
Criterion 6.9. There is a free access on foot in the wilderness				
Park management discusses with Alpenverein objective to agree on high wilderness quality standard for trail marking in the wilderness zone (e.g. less frequent marks, narrow trails, planning and systematic trail monitoring). There needs to be a concept of impact, meaning a limit of acceptable changes.		√		2020
Criterion 6.10. The wilderness zone has no audio pollution.				
Park management develops random monitoring of noise pollution in wilderness zone with a focus on seasonal/weekends when there is a concentration of tourist.	√			2020
Criterion 6.11. The wilderness zone has no light pollution				
Park management continues to monitor light pollution in the wilderness zone with a focus on mountains huts.	√			2020
Criterion 6.12. The wilderness zone has no visual distraction on the horizon				
Park management carries out visual distraction assessments affecting the wilderness zone, focusing on minimizing impact of alpine huts and relevant constructions.	√			2020
Criterion 6.13. The wilderness has no garbage pollution				
It is highly recommended that park management share their experience with dealing with solid waste pollution and management with other wilderness regions in Europe (e.g. recently verified wilderness area in Ukraine).			√	2020
Criterion 6.14. There are recreational fire pits in the wilderness				
n/a				
Criterion 6.15. There are rules for use of horses in the wilderness				
n/a				

Recommendations	Priority			Time Frame
	Low	Medium	High	
Criterion 6.16. The wilderness zone has no fencing				
n/a				
Criterion 6.17. The wilderness zone has a clear rules on the use of dogs				
Park management continues with the strategy of how to use dogs in wilderness zone.		√		2020
Criterion 6.18. The wilderness zone has a clear rules for visitors and recreation activities with concept "leave no trace" rules				
Park management continue with concept of "leave no trace" in the wilderness zone with a specific focus on climbers, hikers and skiers.		√		2020
Criterion 6.19. The wilderness has integrated visitors and recreation strategy to support the wilderness concept				
To develop an integrated visitors and recreation strategy which includes training and communication to support the idea of wilderness.		√		2020

Principle 7: Control strategies for fire, invasive species, and natural turbulence

One of the most profound expressions of wilderness as self-willed land is through ecological disturbance. Natural disturbances such as wildfires and windstorms are important sculptors of landscape and ecosystem the world over but are often considered problematic and undesirable by humankind.

Recommendations	Priority			Time Frame
	Low	Medium	High	
Criterion 7.1. The wilderness has a fire control plan.				
Park management conducts research focusing on the fire history in wilderness.	√			2020
Park management develops education and interpretation programs focusing on fire management and let-it-burn policy.	√			2020
Criterion 7.2. The wilderness has a disease control plan				
Park management continues to research on the dynamism of spontaneous disease outbreak on chamois and ibex in wilderness.		√		2020
Criterion 7.3. An invasive species control plan has been implemented in the wilderness				
Park management continues to research and monitor invasive species in wilderness zone.		√		2020
Park management develops an invasive alien species (IAS) control plan to prevent incursion of invasive species to the wilderness.	√			2020
Park management develops education and interpretation programs focusing on invasive species.		√		2020
Criterion 7.4. The wilderness is impacted by natural events				
Park management develops natural events monitoring plan in the wilderness.		√		2020
Park management develops education and interpretation program focusing on role of natural events in wilderness.			√	2020

Recommendations	Priority			Time Frame
	Low	Medium	High	
Criterion 7.5. The wilderness is impacted by permafrost				
Park management continues research and monitoring of permafrost in wilderness.			√	2020
Park management develops education and interpretation program focusing on permafrost in wilderness.			√	2020

Principle 8: Wilderness Research and Monitoring

Wilderness offers opportunities to study the unique attributes of nature and natural processes. The high quality wilderness research and monitoring provide concrete information so that wilderness managers, planners and organizations are able to make appropriate decisions.

Recommendations	Priority			Time Frame
	Low	Medium	High	
Criterion 8.1. The management has a wilderness research and monitoring strategy.				
Park management continues to research and monitor activities with a focus on wilderness.			√	2020
Park management develops a research and monitoring line with a focus on collecting data on wilderness restoration.			√	2020
Park management develops and implements a communication strategy to sell the outcomes of wilderness research and monitoring.			√	2020
Park management improves coordination with other wilderness protected areas (e.g. unify GIS systems and research methodology among partners focusing on wilderness research).			√	2020
Park management observes impact of researchers and monitoring.			√	2020
Park management proactively uses a network of wilderness regions organized under European Wilderness Preservation System to share research and monitoring knowledge.		√		2020
Park management provides an English summary of the important outcomes of research and monitoring.			√	2020
Criterion 8.2. Management has a monitoring system in place documenting all activities and extractive uses in all zones.				
Park management continues to implement monitoring system to improve management of herbivores, restoration of ibex, tourism management, wilderness interpretive programs, etc.			√	2020
Park management seeks possible funding (e.g. Erasmus) to share their experience with other wilderness regions in Europe using EWS communication platform.		√		2020

Recommendations	Priority			Time Frame
	Low	Medium	High	
Park management looks for opportunities for more wilderness focused research in close cooperation with other protected areas in EWS network, research institutions or universities.			√	2020
Criterion 8.3 The wilderness has a monitoring plan in place to document indigenous peoples' life supporting activities and their impacts.				
n/a				
Criterion 8.4 The wilderness has a detailed plan for cooperation with scientific institutions and universities.				
Park management implements a plan for cooperation with wilderness region, scientific institutions and universities with a focus on wilderness conservation.			√	2020

Principle 9: International Relevance

The importance of wilderness is finally being recognized in Europe. More people and initiatives are beginning to work to protect and expand wilderness.

Recommendations	Priority			Time Frame
	Low	Medium	High	
Criterion 9.1. The wilderness is internationally recognized (IUCN, Natura 2000, UNESCO, other relevant certifications).				
Park management finalizes the process of nomination for EWPS.			√	2020
Criterion 9.2. The wilderness is planning to become part of Natura 2000 network (where relevant and in accordance with the wilderness objectives).				
Park management promotes their experience with non-intervention management in Natura 2000 site			√	2020
Criterion 9.3. The wilderness supports the protection of internationally threatened species.				
Park management develops education and marketing campaign focusing on wilderness and internationally threatened species targeted at schools in the region.			√	2020