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EUROPARC Federation and the Friends of Parks

Majority of the EUROPARC members are national parks, nature parks, regional parks, geoparks, biosphere reserves and world heritage sites of Europe collectively called protected areas or the “parks”. The 400 hundred members, thousands of protected areas in 37 countries represent wide geographical and cultural diversity. Minority of the members represent also different agencies and NGOs, who support the work of protected areas. We have worked over 40 years now for protecting natural and cultural heritage of Europe.

We want to work on our vision and mission. Our vision is “Sustainable nature, valued by people”. EUROPARC very much recognises people and nature together.



Picture 1.

Our Mission is “EUROPARC works for our natural and cultural heritage, to improve and champion the policy and practice of Protected Area management, in order to deliver sustainable nature, valued by people”.
From: EUROPARC Federation Strategy 2015-2021.
Photo: EUROPARC Federation.

We live on a very crowded continent in Europe. The wide variety of landscapes is created by nature and shaped by people. EUROPARC has underlined that we are here together, because our nature knows no boundaries. EUROPARC is not only organisation for nature protection; we are organisation especially for international co-operation. We are here because of personal contacts and developing co-operation. Personal contacts create mutual understanding, shared experiences, knowledge and innovation, we live on each other.

Variety of landscapes, embedded in cultural identity. Sculpted by nature and shaped by people. Influenced course of history, inspired artists and thinkers and enriched lives. They are our natural life support system. These protected areas represent the land that is our inheritance; we hold it in trust for those who come after us.

Nature knows no boundaries. EUROPARC is founded on the principle that the future protection and conservation of nature is achieved through international co-operation. And international cooperation works best through personal contact. Through personal contact comes mutual understanding, shared experiences, knowledge and innovation. This delivers better support and management of protected areas, which ensures the future protection and conservation of nature.

EUROPARC was born on curiosity; people wanted to know what is happening. And that is still very much in our DNA. The Times They Are a-Changin', said Bob Dylan in 1964. This is valid also today. We live in a time on dramatic losses in biodiversity, rapid climate change, financial crisis, mass population movements. Biodiversity loss is slightly controlled because of protected areas, but it still is real threat. EUROPARC is seeking to halt that loss with protected areas. But we cannot do that alone. We need our Friends.



Picture 2.

Hills of Koli National Park seen from the Lake Pielinen.

Nature can often leave us with a sense of awe.

Photo: Metsähallitus.

The intrinsic value of nature is particular major. EUROPARC and Metsähallitus have done great efforts to protect those special values, like here in Koli landscape. The benefits rise from healthy and

resilient landscape. The economy, nature, health and wellbeing in nature and social life are not only interlinked and interrelated but also interdependent. We need sustainable nature valued by people.

The protected areas are the main pillars for the future nature protection. They are more valuable than ever. They are the drivers for sustainable development. Protected areas cannot be isolated islands of the nature. They have wider background in the society in all geographical levels. They indeed are totems, beacons, catalysts of exemplars for a wider sustainable development model.

The protected areas often meet some kind of resistance. But in the wider picture they are most necessary for the nature, people and for the future. As I said, parks cannot do that alone, we need friends and allies. This meeting shows the value of this kind of positive thinking. How to do this forward is a challenge. "A vision without a plan is just a dream. A plan without a vision is just drudgery. But a vision with a plan can change the world." That is something that EUROPARC is very much appraisal to. We also need to change ourselves. Not only to absorb those changes around us, but we need to change to make the difference.

How we may do it. The process consists of four steps; creativity, judgement, patience and forward planning. We bring people together to create ideas. Then we have to evaluate the ideas to find the best solution. Then we need some patience, things do not always happen just like that. And we have to be ready to adaptation in the planning process and renew the plans, when necessary and go more in details in time. Most of all we need a change in perspective. We need to meet one another and learn from one another. Do networking, and that is the most fundamental part of EUROPARC activities. That is what we are here now to do.

Networking is also essential part of the new EUROPARC Strategy, accepted in 2015 in the EUROPARC annual conference in Ireland. The new strategy includes these four main themes: working for nature, helping people and organisations learn, promoting sustainability and working together: building our organisation.

To deliver the actions, which are defined in the strategy, the EUROPARC has organised under its umbrella several working groups and management tools. Collections of best practises and good celebrations as awarding the volunteer work are both important in EUROPARC.

 <p>Life is better with friends :)</p>	<p><u>Picture 3.</u> A good friend carries these qualities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trust• Honesty• Loyalty• Common interests• Fun• Love <p>Friends groups carry these:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make a difference• New skills and experiences• Health and well being• Sense of purpose• Community spirit• Added Value
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My earlier life as a park manager in Pentland Hill Regional Park Scotland gave me some basic understanding on the needs of the root level park manager, how he/she can have success in the work and develop co-operation on the local level. In the management plan of the park it was mentioned that we need more active participation of our local community, for example a Friends Group. We had volunteers in the park. Some people started to come quite regularly to do something in the park; they called themselves as “volunteer rangers”. Some of the volunteers helped me to formulate the plan more in details and then the Friends of Pentland Hill was born. They had 400 members, 6000 hours volunteering annually. I am really proud of the work they did.

Most of the nature reserves in Scotland have some kind of friends group. When the others saw a good practise they also wanted one. Now there are thousands of people within the framework of Friends in Edinburgh region nature parks.

We want to develop within the new EUROPARC strategy a wider base for membership for those who support the parks work and develop the profile of EUROPARC Federation. There is naturally a proper platform for Friends groups within the EUROPARC. We have networks for sustainable tourism charter, transboundary parks, junior rangers and health and parks for instance. Our website shows the activities on the networks. All comes from personal contacts, mutual understanding, seeing the benefits.

When we think the value the Friends are bringing to our personal lives, life would be quite empty without friends. But what makes a good friend. Good friends are honest, loyal, we have common interests, it is fun to be with them. People who come to friends’ groups, they want to make a difference. Social cohesion is important. Friends are adding value for the park.

There exists several types of Friends groups. Some of the Friends are local supporters. Some are very independent but co-operating with park manager. Some are lobbyists and organising campaigns.

Others are just volunteers. Others are fund raisers. Some are concessionaires and some work like social enterprises.

Everything is according the capacity of the area and the people. The Friends meet sometimes capacity problems and the issues on liability, accountability and leadership. The volunteers have other lives. Park is always accountable, but we cannot always say that about volunteers. I don't say these are negative features, but we have to be honest about it. And it makes sometimes interesting relationships, when we work through those issues. These are according to my experiences from my past career as a park manager in Scotland.

Time resources is always an issue for park manager. Priorities may be different. Sometimes park manager forgets that friends are volunteers, not paid workers. The accountability may differ within friends groups. EUROPARC and Friends Societies have a lot of similar values and activities. This makes it reasonable to make co-operation. To work and have fun, which both are important in co-operation.



Picture 4.

Koli National Landscape in summer. Iconic scene from top of the Ukko-Koli Hill to the south-east over the Lake Pielinen.

Friends Groups and EUROPARC have basic matters in common:

- Supporting Parks
- Protecting Nature
- Bringing People Together

Photo: Metsähallitus.

The Friends of Parks Societies and EUROPARC have a lot in common. I think we both are Friends groups, in a way, we are about supporting parks, protecting nature, we are bringing people together that is the basis for any good friendship. I really do think that we have a lot to offer for each other. We obviously want to protect our nature, we want to refresh our ideas, we want to conserve our environment, and perhaps also to inspire each other. We need to play, we need to have fun.

We need to look after the skills and training for the park staff, but also for the people who are supporting the parks. We do not have that kind of plan now in EUROPARC, but when you define what you plan and need for then maybe we could put up some development for that activity. Most of the members of EUROPARC are individual parks. We have now only a few friends' organisations using

Proceedings of the presentations in the international seminar for friends of national parks and other protected areas in Koli National Park, Finland in 16.-17.11.2015

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that name "Friends" as members. But there are plenty of different societies and NGOs and also some SMEs within the membership in different member categories.

And if we all agree with those basis, yes, I think we have a good opportunity for a good friendship. I am now for the second time on Koli and I strongly feel that these kind of places are micro cosmos of the nature, they are the home of a man, they are the theatres of the history and a good place for the future. We need to take this message forwards. The places are the places of sustainable nature, valued by people. I think we can do that later together.

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www.EUROPARC.org

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