

The Alps under threat - sustainable protection for fauna and flora urgently required!

The endangerment of the animals, plants and fungi of the Alps caused by climate change and land use pressures have reached unprecedented levels today. Our previous conservation efforts are inadequate, as documented by numerous Red Lists. The Alps are a special biodiversity hotspot; it is in the pan-European public interest to maintain this outstanding diversity for the future.

As a result, regional experts who delivered the symposium "Threat of the Alpine biosphere by land use intensification and climate change" in Graz call on all residents and policymakers responsible for the alpine region, for a strong and sustainable effort for the protection of nature in the Alps!

The following **ten priorities** need addressing:

1. **Nature conservation needs a climate change adaptation strategy:** Conservation strategies need to be reconsidered in the face of climate change in order to respond flexibly to rapidly changing environmental conditions. Adaptations must be implemented at all levels of impact, but especially at the legal level (e.g. drafting of a federal framework law for nature conservation, re-designation of protected areas).
2. **Urgent measures must be taken to make natural forestry more attractive to forest owners.** The structurally rich, near-natural mountain forest is, in addition to the alpine belt above the tree line, the most species-rich habitat of the Alps. Intensively managed spruce forest is one of the most species-poorest, and using non-native tree species in forestry confounds efforts to suppress invasive species in the landscape.
3. **Further economic development of the alpine zone must be permanently stopped.** These ecosystems, with their biodiversity, are functionally and structurally unique habitats that are crucial for the survival of species in times of climate change.
4. The **endemic species** occurring worldwide only in sub-regions of the Alps must be included as central parts of all impact assessments and protection strategies. **There is a global responsibility for the states along the Alps to protect these species.**
5. **Half the area of the Alps must be designated as a strict protected area in terms of nature reserves or national parks.** The current protected area system of the Alps is inadequate for long-term protection of the biosphere and the continuation of evolution.
6. **Long-term climate change mitigation is of particular concern in the Alpine region.** It is particularly concerned with measures of carbon storage of the soil, as is the case with sustainable small-scale agriculture, with intact bogs and semi-natural mountain forests.
7. **Land use intensification must be stopped:** Intensification of land use through practices such as irrigation and fertilization of nutrient-poor grasslands, or drainage of wetlands, must be stopped for reasons of biodiversity conservation and natural tourism. The consequences of predefined intensification must be reversed.
8. **Restricting the expansion of renewable energies to selected regions:** The biosphere of the Alps is too valuable to prioritize the expansion of renewable energies here too. This is to be limited to pre-stressed regions. Renewable energies should not be used as a justification for building on the last remnants of Central

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European natural landscapes. The development of wind power and hydropower is particularly sensitive, with rivers, including their banks and spring corridors, being particular hotspots of biodiversity.

9. **Stopping the expansion of pure tourism infrastructure:** It cannot be Austria's answer to climate change to move all ski areas to higher elevations and on northern slopes, and to intensify artificial snowmaking. Intact nature is an invaluable public good, the basis of life. Nature preservation must take precedence over the further development of a tourism infrastructure in which the Alps are reduced to a backdrop for commercial leisure activities.

10. **Strengthening public transport:** In terms of transport, priority must be given to the expansion of the public transport network in order to alleviate the burden of traffic-based pollution on nature and the climate.

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