



## **The Future of Protected Areas in the Alps. Political Demands**

Protected areas play an outstanding role in the conservation of Alpine natural and cultural heritage – on the one hand regarding protection and management strategies (nature, know-how, natural and cultural heritage, cultures) and on the other hand regarding economic development strategies which deal with tourism, mountain agriculture and forestry.

The many Alpine protected areas not only have a common territorial identity, they also share joint values. That is why a great number of them have been working together for two decades in the ALPARC Alpine Network of Protected Areas in order to coordinate their efforts and share their experiences and know-how.

ALPARC is committed to protecting Alpine living spaces. Through the exchange of knowledge, experience and methods, the Alpine Network of Protected Areas contributes to ensuring that future generations can enjoy and appreciate the beauty and diversity of the Alps - for humankind and nature, today and in the future.

In order to ensure the continuous and successful carrying out of these activities in nature and landscape protection and in maintaining and improving living conditions for the local population, tourists and visitors, the national parks, nature parks, protected nature areas, biosphere reserves, UNESCO World Natural Heritage sites, geological reserves and administrative bodies in charge of protected areas represented in the ALPARC Alpine Network of Protected Areas declare:

1. The Alpine protected areas are an integral part of future-oriented nature conservation. Their significance for the conservation of the Alpine natural and cultural heritage must be acknowledged on all political levels and awareness raised among the population, tourists and visitors.
2. "If it says park on the cover, it also has to contain park inside." All protected areas require zones with a strict protection status or areas with targeted species and habitat protection that must not be diluted. This applies especially to regional nature parks and similar categories, which focus mainly on regional development.
3. The existing protected areas must be maintained, cared for and, where necessary, extended in accordance with their protective purpose fixed in legislation. The designation of further protected areas may become necessary; not necessarily with the aim to quantitatively increase the share of protected areas but to strengthen the ecological network qualitatively. Steps taken to weaken or even revoke the protection

status of protected areas as can be currently observed in some countries must be prevented or reversed.

4. Nature protection cannot be delegated to protected areas only and nature conservation must not stop at the protected area borders. Nature protection goals can only be achieved if adequate protection is guaranteed all over the Alps, also outside protected areas. The significance of networking between protected areas and with concerned local and regional stakeholder must thus be acknowledged on all political levels and the protected areas administrations must extend their activities beyond the protected area borders in an intermediary and networking manner and shall also receive the necessary political support to do so.
5. Protected areas deliver vital environmental, social and economic benefits to the European and local societies. They thus have to be recognized as an integral part of our economies, territorial development and human well-being. Here, a key requirement is the acknowledgement and compensation of the protected areas' "ecosystem services" from which certain economic sectors benefit. Especially, taxes from tourist service providers who are reliant on intact landscapes and nature areas are one suitable model.
6. Protected areas must be adequately staffed and financed to fulfil their tasks which not only comprise nature protection but also environmental education, research and sustainable development of tourism and other activities. New challenges, for example dealing with climate change or the increased inclusion of the population in activities in the protected areas require more, not fewer resources. The parties to the Alpine Convention, the European Union and the regional authorities in the Alps are called upon to support and sufficiently fund the activities of the ALPARC Alpine Network of Protected Areas and the protected areas' cooperations.

### Conclusion:

Protected areas are the main pillar of Alpine nature conservation policy, covering in all their manifestations with the most diverse nature conservation status about 25 % of the area of the Alpine convention. With their highly-qualified staff, they are in constant contact with the population and visitors. They reach out to regional stakeholders and promote understanding and awareness for nature conservation and sustainable development. The goal by 2030 must be:

- to strengthen all categories of protected areas by attributing to them all a clear nature protection mission without weakening their sustainable development dimension,
- to ensure that they all have appropriate staff to be able to perform their tasks,
- and to coordinate their activities in order that they act as stepping stones towards the creation and strengthening of the Alpine-wide ecological network.