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convenzione delle alpi • alpska konvencija

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Zasedanje Alpske konference

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REPORT OF CHAIR OF THE WORKING PLATFORM
“Ecological Network” on the mandate 2015-2016
Rev.1

1. Overview of mandate 2015 - 2016

Summary of the main mandate points

Main activities and outputs foreseen in the mandate are to:

- support the development of new alpine projects and targeted research on ecological connectivity
- support the Pilot Regions for Ecological Connectivity of the Alpine Convention (PR),
- implement the Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Carpathian Convention
- act as an advocate and catalyst for all aspects linked to ecological connectivity in the Alpine space
- provide inputs to a comprehensive publication on the development of ecological connectivity in the Alps.

The Platform is chaired by a **German-French Co-Presidency**. The Chairperson for the mandate period 2015-2016 is Ms Bettina Hedden-Dunkhorst of the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN).

2. Meetings and activities

Report on activities carried out (including meetings, conferences)

- Four **Platform meetings** (approved minutes available) were held in: Berchtesgaden (D), Bled (SI), Chamonix (F), Grassau (D). Each meeting included a field trip to a PR or PR candidate to interact on connectivity measures in practice.
- As foreseen by the procedure for the **nomination of PR**, an evaluation of each region was carried out. Besides, new potential PR were identified and proposed.
- Support was given to the development and proposals for **new alpine-wide projects**

like ALPBIONET2030 or GreenConnect.

- In the frame of the above mentioned **MoC** exchange took place with the (Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA) and CBD.
- The Platform contributed to several **activities of the Alpine Convention** (inputs to RSA 6, facilitation of visits to PR for “We Alps” tour 2015 etc.) and held presentations at the EU Green Infrastructure meetings and the final conference of the recharge.green project (funded by the EU Alpine Space Programme).

3. Outputs

Description of main outputs achieved

- Statement paper on the link between ecological connectivity and climate change (attached for approval)
- Report of the evaluation of PR
- Workshop on PR, Grassau 12 October 2016 (with exhibition)
- Alpine Week Session on ecological connectivity, Grassau 13 October 2016
- Contribution to RSA 6 on link between Green Economy and ecological connectivity
- Nomination of new PR

4. Cooperation with other WGs/PFs

Description of cooperation initiatives and activities with other WGs/PFs

- Participation in WISO meetings and in workshops for Chairs of Platforms and Working Groups.
- Exchange with other Platform on Mountain Forestry.

5. Links to EUSALP

Description of concrete links and contribution to EUSALP

Member of the EUSALP AG 7.

6. Attachments

List of the attached documents

1. Statement paper on the link between ecological connectivity and climate change;
2. Report on the evaluation of PR.



The Important Role of Ecological Connectivity for Adaptation to Climate Change Impacts in the Alps

A statement by the Platform “Ecological Network” of the Alpine Convention

Climate change in alpine-ecosystems

Climate is one of the most important abiotic factors influencing ecosystems, and alpine systems are in particular sensitive to climate change. The prevailing populations of plants and animals are highly adapted to site characteristics. Other than lowlands, alpine systems - due to their topography - have many sites with a specific microclimate. This is one of the reasons for the high biodiversity, but also for the vulnerability towards climatic change. In the European Alps, temperatures increased by 2 °C in the last hundred years - twice the global average. As a result suitable habitats are reduced and species are forced to move to higher altitudes where temperatures are more conducive to their survival.

Impacts of habitat shifts on species

Shifts in habitat ranges can induce a range expansion for some species, for others it means a range reduction or a movement into less hospitable habitats or increased competition. Some species will have nowhere to move as they are already at the extreme margin of their habitat. In many cases movements will confront species with geographical obstructions or man-made barriers, which will need to be overcome. For numerous species, the climate of their habitat - or different habitats they use over the year - influences key stages of their annual life cycle, such as migration, blooming, and mating. The changing climate conditions can lead to mismatches in the timing of life cycle events, making growth or survival more difficult or even impossible.

Consequences of biodiversity loss for alpine-ecosystems and their services

A loss of biodiversity in the Alps, as induced by climate change, decreases the resilience of the entire ecosystem. A high number of species - as species are considered a major component part of the system - ensures the functionality of the ecosystem. Its multi-functionality can be achieved by supporting and regulating ecosystem services (such as pollination, pest, flood, and erosion control), which also provide for cultural, recreational and aesthetic ecosystem services. Furthermore, the direct and indirect effect of climate change also interacts with other stressors, which cause only minor impacts when acting alone, but their cumulative impact may lead to dramatic ecological changes intensified by the loss of biodiversity.

Ecological connectivity – a necessary response to climate change in the Alps

In order to increase ecosystem resilience and to avoid species extinction, it is crucial to provide plant and animal species with sufficient space and favorable conditions to shift their areas of occurrence. As natural colonization by species is the result of dispersal movements of individuals from a neighboring population, such a process could be promoted by providing habitat and habitat connectivity.

The pan-alpine ecological network aims to interlink existing protected areas - as main areas for species conservation - and to improve the permeability of the landscape matrix, by creating natural elements in a landscape in the form of corridors or stepping stones. As these measures enhance the colonizing capacity of alpine species, which are sensitive to climate change, they are key element to climate change adaptation.

Necessity of a trans-sectorial approach

The main artificial barriers to ecological connectivity are settlements and transport infrastructures. Land use for other purposes such as agriculture, energy production or distribution, or tourism can also hinder the movement of animal and plant species. An integrated spatial planning is thus needed to provide suitable corridors for the fauna and flora between protected areas.

Creating a coherent network of existing protected areas, embedded in a multifunctional landscape allowing mutual support, can only be effective when implemented at a multinational level throughout the entire mountain range.



Evaluation of the Pilot Regions for Ecological Connectivity of the Alpine Convention

Report to the 62. Permanent Committee of the Alpine Convention to be held 11-12 October 2016,
Grassau (Germany)

1 The Pilot Regions for Ecological Connectivity of the Alpine Convention

Since 2004 several activities were carried out in the Alpine region to implement an alpine ecological network as defined in Article 12 of the *Nature Protection Protocol* of the Alpine Convention. In the frame of the EU funded ETC Alpine Space Project ECONNECT (2008-2012), a number of alpine territories directly involved in the implementation of activities towards an ecological network addressed a request to the Platform Ecological Network of the Alpine Convention to officially support and recognize their efforts and contribution to the realization of a pan-alpine ecological network. As a response to this request, in 2010, the Platform Ecological Network of the Alpine Convention developed and adopted procedures for the nomination of Pilot Regions for Ecological Connectivity in the Alps¹. Areas to be nominated should be especially active in supporting an ecological network in the Alps.

According to the procedures nominations as Pilot Regions can be carried out at each Alpine Conference. The decision to recognize a Pilot Region is based on a questionnaire completed by the applying region. The questionnaire uses a number of criteria to gather details both on a region's ecological characteristics and its active contribution to sustainable development, as well as on concrete projects and measures, which help to promote an ecological network in the Alps. The completed questionnaire is evaluated according to a scores system. In order to be nominated, an area must obtain a minimum number of scores and/or, depending on the final scores, must have singularity status. The nomination is valid for a limited duration, but can be renewed after an evaluation. Since 2011 eight alpine regions have been officially nominated as Pilot Regions for Ecological Connectivity of the Alpine Convention, after successfully completing the above described procedure. At the XIVth Alpine Conference (13 October 2016, Grassau, Germany) two additional Pilot Regions will be nominated.

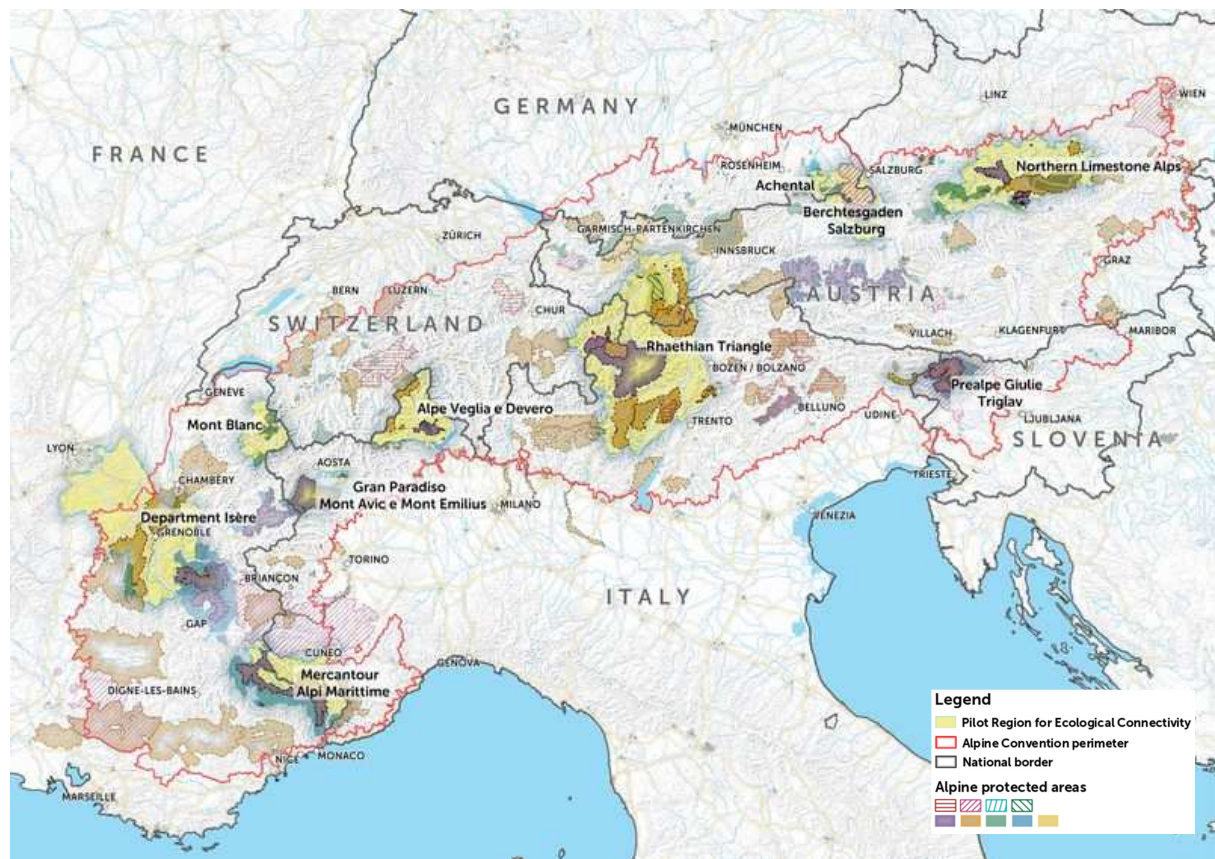
Currently the following Pilot Regions for Ecological Connectivity of the Alpine Convention are listed (from south-west to north-east):

- South-western Alps (National Park Mercantour/Nature Park Alpi Marittime)
- French Department Isère
- Ecoregion Gran Paradiso - Mont Avic - Mont Emilius
- Ecoregion Mont-Blanc (to be nominated at XIVth Alpine Conference)

¹ http://www.alpconv.org/en/organization/groups/WGEcologicalNetwork/Documents/Pilotregionen_e-2.pdf

- Ecoregion Verbano-Cusio-Ossola
- Raethian triangle (Engadin/Southtyrol/Trentino/Tyrol)
- Achental (to be nominated at XIVth Alpine Conference)
- Transboundary region Berchtesgaden - Salzburg
- Transboundary ecoregion Julian Alps
- Northern Limestone Alps region

Map of the Pilot Regions for Ecological Connectivity of the Alpine Convention (October 2016)



Being nominated as a Pilot Region can result both, in socio-economic and ecological benefits. Besides, Pilot Regions can have an advantage to attract funding (through various funding mechanisms) for activities which contribute to promoting ecological connectivity. Meanwhile, this could be realized by several Pilot Regions in the past.

According to the adopted procedure the Pilot Regions have to be evaluated in a regular interval to demonstrate that they are still actively engaged in promoting and improving ecological connectivity. The evaluation of the existing Pilot Regions was carried from June to September 2016. The main results are summarized in this report.

2 Evaluation process for the Alpine Pilot Regions for Ecological Connectivity

The aim of the process was to verify that Pilot Regions, which would like to be furthermore designated as a Pilot Region for Ecological Connectivity of the Alpine Convention prove to be still

active in promoting and improving ecological connectivity both, at the local level and as a model region nationally. Besides, the evaluation should reveal progress on ecological connectivity that could be achieved in the region since the nomination and thus showcase best practices.

In the frame of the evaluation process, interviews were carried out by the Platform presidency with representatives of each Pilot Region - sometimes together with the respective country representatives of the Platform Ecological Network of the Alpine Convention. The interview covered the following aspects.

- The **activities** carried out, that contribute to an improvement of the ecological connectivity at local, subnational, national, and transboundary level, since 2011;
- an assessment of the **strength and weaknesses** of the activities carried out in the regions and at alpine level;
- the main **achievements** of the Pilot Region in the field of ecological connectivity since 2011;
- an outline of the **perspectives** for the future (what is planned for the future, what will be done in the next 2-4 years).

The findings from the evaluation process will be discussed with representatives of the Pilot Regions at a workshop to be held in the context of the second 2016 meeting of the Platform Ecological Network on 12 October 2016. The aim of the workshop is to provide a forum to present activities and approaches and to discuss experiences obtained in the various parts of the Alps. As a result of the workshop further cooperation possibilities as well as a shared strategy for the future will be outlined. Besides, at a side event during the Alpine Week, to be held in Grassau (Germany), 13 October 2016, the work of the Pilot Regions will be introduced to the public.

3 Main results of the Evaluation

The interviews with the representatives of the Pilot Regions showed that a number of activities directly linked to the **improvement of ecological connectivity** were carried out in all Pilot Regions since the first nomination in 2011. The range of activities and measures implemented by the Pilot Regions is large and diverse, including **concrete restoration activities** (for example the restoration of a water course in the Transboundary Pilot Region Berchtesgaden/Salzburg or the creation of a fish pass on a sill in the Breda River in the Pilot Region Isère) to **monitoring activities** (joint transboundary monitoring of chamois in the Pilot Region Julian Alps) or **environmental education** initiatives ("Network Natural Forest" Hiking trail in the Pilot Region Northern Limestone Alps; "Action days" for Volunteers in the Pilot Region Raethian Triangle).

With regard to the **governance model** implemented in the Pilot Regions as well as the main stakeholders and actors involved in connectivity activities, the situations in the Pilot Regions prove to be very different, based on the local context and the particularities of the region. In most regions the protected areas managers are the driving forces for the activities. The cooperation between different regional partners is formalized to different degrees, some have set up a regular meeting schedule, others are organizing their activities in a more informal way.

Nevertheless, all Pilot Regions showed it proved to be feasible to involve stakeholders from the major relevant sectors for ecological connectivity (agriculture, forestry, landscape- and spatial planning, tourism, nature protection etc.) in connectivity activities.

Concerning the main **achievements** of the Pilot Regions, the evaluation revealed a number of issues. One major achievement is related to the broader visibility and recognition of the importance of

conservation and biodiversity issues by decision-makers and the public. Even if changes in policy and legal context in the regions often depend on the wider political context, the developments that took place in some of the Pilot Regions (for example the establishment of the Regional Scheme of Ecological Coherence in the French Regions) and the consideration of Pilot Regions' activities in these developments, shows that their activities also contribute to increase the visibility for the need of ecological connectivity for biodiversity conservation on a larger policy level.

All Pilot Regions were, in addition, asked to provide some concrete outlooks for the future advancement of ecological connectivity in their territory and perspectives for their future activities. The outlooks presented by the Pilot Regions showed, inter alia, that the connectivity approach offers a multi-sectoral development and cooperation tool, which offers the possibility to unite actors from different sectors to jointly carry out projects for a sustainable development. The Transboundary Pilot Region Julian Alps, for example, has a medium-term perspective of creating a transboundary UNESCO Biosphere reserve and addressing the topic of ecological connectivity, alongside with other regional topics, in an international context in this new framework.

4 In Conclusion

All eight Pilot Regions nominated in 2011 successfully proved their continuous strong involvement on the topic of ecological connectivity, as well as their determination and motivation to pursue their activities in the next years and showed the concrete contribution which their work offers to the implementation of a pan-alpine ecological network as described by the Alpine Convention.

The Platform Ecological Network therefore confirms the recognition of all eight regions as Pilot Regions for Ecological Connectivity of the Alpine Convention for the upcoming four years.