

NATIONAL PARK STRATEGY AUSTRIA 2020+

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Republic of Austria
Sustainability and Tourism



NATIONAL
PARKS
AUSTRIA 

IMPRINT

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Foreword



Protected areas are one of the best investments in the future. To preserve the diversity in the long term, we must assume responsibility and sustainably protect natural ecosystems. Only through professional National Park management can our natural jewels survive, especially in times of rapid climatic changes. The National Parks Strategy 2020+ presented here essentially builds on the strategy adopted in 2010, as well as on the results of a comprehensive evaluation of all six Austrian national parks. Thus, our natural heritage can be preserved for future generations!

I would like to sincerely thank the responsible officials of the Provincial Parliaments, as well as all the nominated members of the Advisory Council of Nationalparks Austria, who have actively developed this strategy and unanimously recommended it.

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Preamble

As places of outstanding biological diversity, the six Austrian national parks are the natural jewels of our country and thus part of Austrian identity. In 2010, a national park strategy was adopted for the first time to ensure their concerted development. Numerous projects have been implemented and a number of forward-thinking policy papers have been adopted by the Advisory Board of Nationalparks Austria. The document presented here represents a continuation of the first National Parks Strategy 2010–2015 and covers the period up to 2020+. By working together, individual national parks can enhance their efficiency and effectiveness as well as achieve added value. The supporters of the strategy – the Federal Government, represented by the Federal Ministry of Sustainability and Tourism (BMNT), Burgenland, Carinthia, Lower Austria, Upper Austria, Salzburg, Styria, Tyrol, and Vienna, as well as the national park administrations – are attempting to implement it in their respective fields of competence. NGOs represented on the Nationalparks Austria Advisory Board will also contribute to its implementation. The supporters of the strategy are also asking municipalities and stakeholders to provide the best possible support for its implementation. The National Parks Strategy 2020+¹ sets targets for the next five years to be implemented within the framework of work programmes and projects. There are six areas of activity with twelve objectives and concrete measures. Priority is given to increasing areas free of human influence in accordance with IUCN guidelines, preserving biodiversity, exploiting synergies between the national parks, and professional presentation to the outside world under the brand ‘Nationalparks Austria’. In order to achieve the visionary goals, far-reaching activities are necessary beyond 2020. Evaluation of the implementation is planned.

¹ / This strategy is defined as a fundamental, long-term performance guide to achieve the objectives.

Vision

Austria's natural heritage in 2035

The typical natural and cultural landscapes of Austria, with their characteristic biological diversity and ecologically dynamic processes, are covered by a wide range of protection and support measures, as well as by differentiated sustainable management. National parks and wilderness areas play a crucial role in this as representative, large-scale and largely non-intervention protected areas and part of a country-wide ecological network.

Austria's national parks in 2035

National parks represent the preservation of national natural heritage and are part of Austrian identity. In politics and society, national parks have a very high value. All involved parties and the entire population identify with the national park idea. All types of natural ecosystem are protected by national parks. The national park surroundings take into account national park objectives.

In Austria, a coherent network of protected areas exists in which each national park acts as the centre of an ecological network and plays an active role. The national parks help to increase the long-term survival chances of species and ecological communities; they also help in achieving national biodiversity targets under the Austrian Biodiversity Strategy 2020+. National parks are a role model for modern protected area management. The people living in national park regions are committed to nature conservation and benefit from it. Sustainable tourism development and the special image of regional products contribute significantly to regional value creation. National parks are recognized as places of education, experience and recreation for people throughout Austria.

Cooperation between the national parks under the brand 'Nationalparks Austria' has been successful. Synergies are also used from an economic point of view.

There has been intensive cooperation with selected protected areas in Austria, across Europe and beyond. Nationalparks Austria is a partner in protected area networks at an international level and represents the interests of the Austrian national parks, e.g. in the field of quality standards. Austria sets international benchmarks for protected area management, capacity building for protected area administrations, and many other fields. Austrian national parks successfully contribute to the development of solutions for current challenges such as climate change, species loss, invasive species, fragmentation, and protection of the large predators, namely lynx, bear and wolf. National parks are innovative places to enable natural processes, preserve evolutionary potential, and maintain intact natural ecosystems and their services.

The development of national parks is never finished. National parks are subject to constant change and new challenges. Future generations should also be able to experience nature in this original form. National parks guarantee high quality nature conservation.





Area of activity:

NATURAL AREA MANAGEMENT AND BIODIVERSITY

Objective 1:

In nature zones, there should be natural development according to IUCN guidelines

The central task of each national park is the protection of the original wildlife and nature by allowing natural processes. In accordance with international guidelines (IUCN protected area category II²), at least³ 75% of the area is to be transferred to a zone which is no longer commercially used by humans. Efforts to achieve this objective have been made steadily, and significant improvements to the status quo should be made over the next few years.

Measures

- Create a standardised zoning system⁴.
- Define management objectives and management measures according to uniform guidelines for the individual zones.
- Concepts for the creation of areas which are no longer commercially used in accordance with the IUCN principle should be drawn up for at least 75% of the total area under the management plans.
- Adapt management activities (wildlife management/ hunting, forest management, agriculture, alpine farming, etc.) to the protection of natural process and embed them in the management plans in accordance with IUCN guidelines for category II, as well as the position papers and guidelines⁵ adopted by Nationalparks Austria.
- If possible, identify suitable areas within the nature zones as wilderness areas according to IUCN protected area category Ib⁶; the procedures for designation of wilderness areas to be specified by a committee of experts.

2 / IUCN Category II National Park: Large natural or near natural areas set aside to protect large-scale ecological processes, along with the complement of species and ecosystems characteristic of the area, which also provide a foundation for environmentally and culturally compatible spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities.

3 / Due to the special situation of Hohe Tauern National Park with regard to statutory regulations, zoning and size, the achievement of this objective is related to the inner zone (core zone). The relatively large external zone (outer zone), with a semi-natural cultural landscape for preserving biodiversity, serves as a buffer to the settlement area. In Neusiedler See-Seewinkel National Park, the IUCN accepts a non-intervention zone of only 50%. The management zone in this case is of equal importance in terms of biodiversity conservation.

4 / The use of uniform zoning terms is primarily intended for external communication.

5 / Recommendations for uniform standards for management plans (final report LEGZU Guidelines, Principles, Cooperation, Nationalparks Austria), also see footnote 9.

6 / IUCN Category Ib Wilderness Area: Protected areas that are usually large unmodified or slightly modified areas, retaining their natural character and influence, without permanent or significant human habitation, which are protected and managed so as to preserve their natural condition.

Objective 2:

Species and habitats are protected as far as possible

National parks have a special responsibility for species and habitats of national and international importance. Conservation priorities are differentiated according to zoning. In the nature zone / core zone, species whose habitats require no anthropogenic influence will be preserved or introduced in the long term. The conservation zone / outer zone is prioritized for species and habitats which are subject to site-specific, usually extensive use. National parks therefore also protect particularly rare biotope types and their range of species, as well as endemic species and important habitats and refuge areas. In the densely populated and intensively used areas of Central Europe, natural habitats are subject to a variety of influences. National parks are also affected by anthropogenic disturbances, such as climate change, invasive species, pollutant inputs, and infrastructure. An analysis of the sources of these disturbances is necessary in order to develop solutions and prevention strategies, as far as possible, and to take appropriate measures.

Measures

- Identify and record species and habitats of international (and in particular also EU) and national interests for which national parks have a particular responsibility; thereupon, build concepts with particular regard to climate change for the protection of species and habitats with a clear focus on process protection in the nature zone and integrating them into management plans.
- Improve cooperation with national park neighbours to improve the protection of species populations for which the national parks environment is also significant.
- Motivate owners and beneficiaries so that they support the objectives and tasks of the national parks in their strategic focus and management policies, both within and outside the national parks.
- Strengthen the biotope network by increasing the quality of facilities; improving the quality of the relevant areas and structural features⁷.
- Optimal coordination with neighbouring protected areas.
- Increasingly involve authorities, licenced hunters and other interested parties in conservation projects.
- Examine the possibility of enlarging existing national parks and, if possible, gradually implement it.
- Investigate objectives, nature conservation need and feasibility of establishing new national parks.
- Promote consistent implementation of national and international strategies⁸ and all of the national park position papers⁹.
- Cease hunting, with the exception of game stock regulation, according to management plans.
- Undertake national park compliant wildlife/ecological spatial planning and habitat networking in the national park region with authorised hunters and competent authorities.
- Clarify the compatibility of fishing with national park objectives, record and monitor invasive species; conduct control measures to balance damage and benefits, taking into account process protection.
- Evaluate national park path and road infrastructure requirements and adapt where appropriate.
- Reduction of the impacts of hydroelectric power stations and water use, as well as impairment of watercourse structure by construction works in accordance with the EU Water Framework Directive.
- Strive to minimize disturbance by 'private' air traffic, including training and supply flights, as well as drones.

7 / See Austrian Biodiversity Strategy 2020+

8 / E.g. Austrian Biodiversity Strategy 2020+

9 / 'Nationalparks und Erneuerbare Energie - eine Position von Nationalparks Austria' ('National Parks and Renewable Energy - a position of Nationalparks Austria') Resolution of the NPA Advisory Board 05.11.2014; 'Positionspapier des Fachausschusses Borkenkäfermanagement' ('Position paper of the expert committee on bark beetle management') Resolution of the NPA Advisory Board 10.04.2013; 'Leitbild für das Management von Schalenwild in Österreichs Nationalparks' ('Guidelines for the management of ungulates in Austria's national parks') Resolution of the NPA Coordination Group 05.07.2015; 'Empfehlung des Beirates Nationalparks Austria zur Rettung der pannonischen Salzlebensräume (Salzsümpfe, Salzsteppen und Salzacken) im Nationalpark Neusiedler See-Seewinkel' ('Recommendation of the Advisory Board of Nationalparks Austria for rescuing Pannonian saline habitats (salt marshes, salt streams and salt lakes) in Neusiedler See-Seewinkel National Park') Resolution of the Advisory Board 13.01.2016; 'Wildnis und Prozessschutz in Österreichischen Nationalparks' ('Wilderness and process protection in Austrian national parks') (in preparation).



Area of activity:

AWARENESS RAISING AND EXPERIENCE OF NATURE

Objective 3:

Awareness and acceptance of national parks are high

Austria's national parks make a significant contribution to the preservation of national natural heritage. Raising public awareness of the achievements and positive effects of national parks and increasing acceptance in the regions and among stakeholders is of particular importance for the further positive development of national parks in our country.

All national parks already have independent professional public relations. Through the project initiated by the BMNT to strengthen the public relations work of Nationalparks Austria, numerous national measures are already being implemented. This nationwide cooperation should be further expanded to enhance communication and to increase awareness among the population.

In particular, cooperation with tourism organizations and other economic partners should take place. Due to the increasing relevance of web-based information channels, modern communication media should be increasingly used. Awareness of the values of our national parks will be further strengthened under the 'Nationalparks Austria' brand.

Measures

- Increase the acceptance of national parks in the national park regions and municipalities.
- Cooperation between public relations departments in the national parks; thematic and content-based coordination between the national parks to expand and push forward the field of public relations.
- Take the national park idea to the general public, addressing new target groups in addition to nature-loving people.
- Develop the 'Nationalparks Austria' brand.

Objective 4:

Diverse possibilities for experiencing nature

An essential task of Austrian national parks is to enable people to experience unspoilt nature. As high-quality protected areas, in which economic use is largely excluded, the Austrian national parks have a special responsibility and opportunity to do this. Essential components of visitor guidance are the existing hiking trails and climbing routes as well as mountain huts.

Environmental education is one of the tasks of national parks. Visitors to Austrian national parks can choose from a range of different opportunities which impart knowledge and experience of nature. Thereby, different target groups are addressed with appropriate educational offerings on various topics. Programmes for children and young people have a central role. This ensures that future generations know about national parks and appreciate them. As a result, school programmes and programmes communicating a feeling for nature are being further developed and intensified. All educational programmes are subject to quality assurance and regular evaluation.

National parks are also places of rest and relaxation; they also help visitors to reduce stress and to prevent illnesses. Experience of nature, combined with exercise, has been shown to have a number of positive effects on the body and mind. People's health, social and physical well-being, as well as their quality of life, can be promoted through the beneficial and healing influence of nature.

Measures

- Develop educational offers in the individual national parks in accordance with common standards, with a focus on process protection and wilderness.
- Prepare offers with an emphasis on nature experience for visitors, strengthened by cooperation with regional and national tourism organizations.
- Further develop and improve programmes which help the mental and physical health of visitors.
- Create barrier-free educational opportunities for people with special needs.
- Continue with and expand work with schools and young people (Junior Rangers) in the national park regions.
- Work together to identify and solve conflicts between nature conservation and tourism, especially in nature zones.
- Ongoing monitoring of visitor behaviour and adaptation of control measures.
- Emphasise the contribution of national parks to health and well-being.
- Get feedback on the offers in all national parks and ensure a corresponding shift in quality assurance.



Area of activity:

RESEARCH AND MONITORING

Objective 5:

Improve scientific knowledge about the status of and trends in biodiversity

Research in Austrian national parks is mainly based on up-to-date research concepts. In order to strengthen and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of national park research, it is essential to harmonize research programmes in accordance with a research concept. The objective is completion of basic data and the implementation of long-term monitoring. Monitoring is used to review the status and trends of selected species and habitats as indicators of biodiversity.

Measures

- Nationalparks Austria should develop and implement a research concept.
- Prepare standardised guidelines for the content and structure of the research programmes; carry out gap analysis to orientate future research activities in terms of national park management objectives and tasks.
- Develop and implement coordinated research and monitoring programmes for all national parks.
- Establish long-term monitoring to survey the status and trends of selected species and habitats in all national parks.
- Establish research priorities for the influence of climate change on ecosystems in national parks, as well as on freely occurring natural processes.
- Long-term, accessible and networked research and monitoring data, taking into account possible georeferencing information which conforms to INSPIRE standards¹⁰.
- Develop and install user-oriented knowledge management.

10 / INSPIRE: Infrastructure for Spatial Information in the European Community; EU Directive 2007/2/EG, more information on the Homepage: www.inspire.gv.at





Area of activity:

REGIONAL, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Objective 6:

The objectives of national parks are increasingly considered in the regions

National parks have an effect beyond the boundaries of the protected area. They are closely linked to their surrounding regions and, in many respects, provide a stimulus for the development of a larger area. In particular the national parks have an important function in the networking of protected areas in the surrounding area. To better represent the interests of national parks in regional and national planning processes, national park administrations should play a central role.

A sense of good governance has already proved itself in terms of good coordination with municipalities, NGOs and other stakeholders, as well as participation in platforms for other regional actors, such as LEADER groups. This allows national parks to make use of the many synergies of the national park regions in a positive way. Already established panels for cooperation with regional and national stakeholders will be continued and expanded, in particular with representatives from the areas of voluntary nature protection, regional development, and tourism.

Measures

- Assess the extent to which cooperation with regional stakeholders (municipalities, owners, persons holding limited rights of use, NGOs, stakeholders) can be improved through their own platforms or offers.
- Play an active role in the elaboration of development concepts (e.g. ecological priority areas); increase collaboration with planners and stakeholders.
- Expand the role of national parks in the development and implementation of regional projects (e.g. products from the regions).
- Work together with tourism in terms of improving marketing and strengthening the focus of tourism in national parks.
- National park offers and initiatives for sustainable transport.
- Review land use in the national park regions in terms of ecological networking (green infrastructure) between national parks and their surroundings.

Objective 7:

Institutionalisation of national and international cooperation

Collaboration between the administrations of Austrian national parks and international national parks exists and is institutionalized. Cooperation agreements should be developed between national parks which are separated by national boundaries as well as those in a Federal Province or in a region. Cooperation between national parks should be strengthened in general in order to make even better use of synergies and to further increase efficiency in various areas.

Nationalparks Austria as a coalition of all Austrian national parks has successfully established itself in recent years and professional cooperation takes place at many levels. Austrian national parks play an active and partially leading role in transnational European protected area networks.

Measures

- Develop and implement concepts between Austrian national parks in the fields of environmental education, public relations, visitor guidance, research and documentation.
- Expand and institutionalise strategic and operational collaboration between the administrations of international and regional neighbouring national parks.
- Continuous active participation of Austrian national parks in European protected areas networks (e.g. Europarc, Alparc, Danube Parks) as well as continue and expand international co-operation.
- Further development and strengthening of 'Nationalparks Austria'.



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- 3. Die Mitarbeiter sollten mehr Verantwortung erhalten.
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Area of activity:

ORGANISATION AND OPERATION

Objective 8:

Management plans are produced and implemented for all national parks

In all Austrian national parks, allowing intervention or natural development on national park land is determined on the basis of management plans. All national parks have strategy and planning documents, which in the broader sense, can be considered as management plans. These currently differ in many respects.

The management plan is an easy-to-understand core document in which additional elements can be incorporated (technical plans and sub-plans, action plans, annual programming, project schedules, area-related specifications, etc.). The plans aim for common standards and harmonization in terms of function, content, structure, target groups, deadlines, obligation, and format.

Like all protected areas, national parks are established on a permanent basis and serve the preservation of natural heritage for future generations. Therefore, young people should also be involved in the further development of national parks.

Measures

- Prepare, approve and implement management plans in all national parks in accordance with common standards¹¹.
- Specify strategic and evaluable objectives, from which the action planning and work schedules can be derived.
- Regular revision of management plans (revised every ten years, mid-term review after five years).
- Identify joint management tasks for all national parks and implement them according to a fixed schedule.
- Identify and implement possibilities for involving young people¹² in the panels of national parks.
- Increase the proportion of women in these panels.
- Integrate national park panels, administration and politics in the preparation and evaluation of management plans according to the specific circumstances of each national park.

11 / e.g. see 'Empfehlungen für einheitliche Standards für Managementpläne' ('Recommendations for uniform standards for management plans') (final report LEGZU, guidelines, principles, cooperation – Nationalparks Austria)

12 / e.g. Representatives of Österreichische Naturschutzjugend (Austrian Youth for Nature Protection)

Objective 9: National park employees are highly motivated and qualified

Our national parks have highly qualified and committed employees. In order to increase their skills, their qualifications should be improved according to their requirements through further training programmes. To this end, participation in international (funded) research and other projects can be appropriate. The national parks' personnel policy respects equal opportunities.

The involvement of socially disadvantaged groups in activities tailored specifically for them strengthens the social competence of national parks. For these groups, specific activities¹³ should be developed and implemented together with partner organizations such as municipalities, social institutions, NGOs, etc.

Measures

- Strive for a balance between male and female employees, including in management positions.
- Develop a standardised concept for further training and organize appropriate offers.
- Establish a training and further education institute 'Nationalparks Austria Training Academy'.
- Involve disadvantaged groups in targeted conservation activities and programmes.

13 / Preventative health care or health promoting measures by working with plants and animals, or working in the countryside. The objective is to maintain or improve people's social, physical and mental well-being.



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Area of activity:

LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND FINANCING

Objective 10:

Relevant legislation is harmonized with the objectives of the national parks

National parks are in conflict with other forms of land use, both within and outside their park borders. Planning and certain forms of land use beyond the control of national parks can have a negative impact on them and can be incompatible with the objectives of the national parks. In order to avoid conflicts of interest, the legal framework is to be reviewed and national park targets should be considered in relevant federal and provincial laws.

Measures

- Review existing national park legislation to determine whether further provisions are necessary to safeguard national park objectives and, where appropriate, suggest amendments.
- Review relevant national and provincial laws (hunting rights, forest law, water rights, spatial planning, etc.) in the sense of equality or prioritization of the national park targets against the objectives of the other matters and, where appropriate, suggest amendments.
- Check the national parks administrations right to be involved as a party in procedures which are essential to the national parks and national park regions and, if necessary, suggest appropriate legislative changes.

Objective 11:

Financing is secured

All national parks are funded jointly by the Federal Government and the Austrian Federal Provinces in accordance with so-called Art. 15a B-VG agreements¹⁴ according to a fixed allocation scale. These grants are largely not valorised. Even in times of tight general budgets, no absolute reductions have been made to date. Rather, the possibility has arisen for attracting additional resources under the rural development programme. Longer-term planning has therefore always been possible for national parks. A mixture of measures will be necessary to ensure finances are covered for the national parks' various tasks in the coming years.

Measures

- Increase cost efficiency in the individual national park administrations and between the national parks through appropriate management measures.
- Increased provision and procurement of funding from outside of core financing.
- Ensure adequate core financing for national parks.
- Continue and strengthen sponsorship and partnerships with business.
- Carry out periodic performance reports (ecological, economic, social) also with reference to ecosystem services.

Objective 12:

National parks and nature conservation benefits are secured in the long term

Remuneration for nature conservation benefits on national park land is done via conservation management agreements. Thus, national parks have a suitable instrument at their disposal which enables them to secure or lease national park land in 'public' ownership and with private individuals for the long term.

Short-term lease agreements bring a degree of uncertainty, particularly in the context of competing land grants. Long-term protection of these areas should therefore to be sought. In addition, national parks do not always own the rights for certain uses, such as hunting or fishing. This can lead to problems in the conservation zones / core zones which, as non-intervention areas, must be free of any use.

Measures

- Create agreements with an appropriate duration.
- Aim to transfer usage rights (lease) to the national park.
- Non-intervention areas, where not all usage rights have been transferred to the national park, can be secured in the long-term by conservation management agreements.
- Evaluate support programmes for national park conformity and avoid competing measures.
- Continue efforts to enlarge national parks, especially where these have been agreed by State Treaties.

NATIONALPARK
Thayatal

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Zum Nationalparkhaus
K domu Národního parku

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Evaluation parameters

Implementation of the strategy will be reviewed through an evaluation process. The following measurable parameters or criteria shall be used for this:

- Extent of non-intervention areas compared to 2016.
- Status and trend of selected species and habitats (e.g. predators, those protected under EU environmental directives, or species for which national parks have a particular responsibility defined).
- Public awareness of national parks.
- Level of acceptance in the region and by stakeholders.
- Extent of the threat to the protected natural resources by the behaviour of visitors.
- Level of visitor satisfaction.
- Extent and quality of accessibility of information centres and educational facilities.
- Amount and quality of the offers for 'nature experience and health' in the visitor programmes.
- Quality of the research and monitoring programmes.
- Number of geo-referenced records of selected species and habitats.
- Extent and quality of cooperation with regional stakeholders (e.g. number of platforms, offers developed).
- Number of regional development concepts that take account of ecological priority areas.
- Number and quality of regional projects (e.g. contribution to regional value added).
- Number of bookings and packages developed for visitors.
- Number of joint activities (e.g. with neighbouring national parks, cross-border cooperation)
- Content, quality and commitment of management plans.
- Share of employees (especially in managerial positions).
- Number of participants on further education courses.
- Quality of training and further education concepts of the 'Nationalparks Austria Training Academy'.
- Number and quality of activities with socially marginalised groups.
- Review legislation.
- Amount of funds available.
- Level of funding from other available sources.
- Number of new, extended or converted lease agreements compared to 2016.
- Extent to which national parks usage rights have been transferred compared to 2016.





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