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Press pack

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ALPARC
The Alpine Network of Protected Areas
Le Réseau Alpin des Espaces Protégés
La Rete delle Aree Protette Alpine
Das Netzwerk Alpiner Schutzgebiete
Mreža zavarovanih območij v Alpah
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ALPARC: THE ALPINE NETWORK OF PROTECTED AREAS

The Alpine Network of Protected Areas – ALPARC – represents all types of large protected areas (over 100 ha) that fall under the scope of the Alpine Convention.
Since 1995, ALPARC has facilitated close contacts between the regional and national parks, nature reserves, biosphere reserves, quiet zones and many other types of protected area, not to mention cooperation with nature conservation agencies and institutions, local stakeholders, local residents and scientific experts.

Some key dates:

1994 France instigates the notion of creating an international network of Alpine protected areas.

1995 The Ecrins National Park organises the First International Conference of Alpine Protected Areas; creation of ALPARC. The Network is managed by a team that reports to the Ecrins National Park.

2000 The Alpine Network of Protected Areas (ALPARC) is formally recognised by the environment ministers of the Alpine countries as contributing to the implementation of the Alpine Convention.

2000 ALPARC rules of procedures are established.

2002 ALPARC organises the Conference of protected areas in European mountain areas (representatives from 20 countries).

2004 The Permanent Committee of the Alpine Convention commissions ALPARC to carry out a study on ecological corridors and cross-border areas.

2005 ALPARC celebrates its 10th anniversary.

2006 The Protected Areas Task Force is created as part of the Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention. It takes on the task of coordinating ALPARC.

2008 In conjunction with other partners, ALPARC launches a large-scale project to establish ecological corridors with the long-term aim of creating a genuine ecological network.

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SOME FACTS AND FIGURES ABOUT THE ALPS

- The Alps extend across 8 countries: Austria, France, Germany, Italy, the Principality of Liechtenstein, the Principality of Monaco*, Slovenia and Switzerland.
- They are home to over 14 million inhabitants (from 3 million in 1938)
- Surface area: 190,000 km²
- 500 million overnight stays in 2000, making the Alps the world's top tourist region.
- A unique network of mountainous protected areas:

  - 14 national parks
  - 70 natural and regional parks
  - approximately 300 nature reserves
  - 10 biosphere reserves
  - 2 UNESCO world heritage sites
  - 2 geological reserves

That adds up to roughly 400 protected areas in the main categories alone.

In addition, there are a further 500 special protected areas (quiet zones, protected landscapes, classified sites, etc.), which often overlap with the existing protected areas.

All in all, that makes around **900 large Alpine protected areas** (over 100 ha) **registered in 2008**, which cover almost **25% of the Alps** (as defined in the scope of the Alpine Convention).

>> Link: *www.alparc.org/the-alps*

* The Principalities of Monaco and Liechtenstein do not have (large) protected mountain areas to manage, but are nevertheless very committed to conservation and addressing the issues that affect the Alps, and actively contribute to the work done under the Alpine Convention.

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THE ALPINE PROTECTED AREAS

ALPARC brings together a whole range of different yet complementary protected areas and has defined the values that they share:

1. **The land.** We are all **ALPINE** protected areas. We are united by **the ALPS**. We protect and defend our **common Alpine** natural, historical and cultural **heritage**.

2. **Our concerns.** We want to tackle **issues** and challenges that are **common** to all protected areas: sustainable development, nature conservation, research, leisure and discovery, awareness-raising and education, culture. All of these are also of interest to the wider public.

3. **Our network.** We, the Alpine protected areas, are stronger when we combine forces: through **cooperation** and **working within a network**, our combined voice and actions are powerful (more clout with decision-makers). The network stands for: **learning** from one another, **sharing** expertise, joint projects.

4. **Our skills.** We are more effective if we pool our skills and expertise.

5. **Biodiversity.** We protect biodiversity on our lands and are seeking to create a physical network with tangible links between our protected areas in order to preserve that biodiversity.

6. **Our social role.** In addition to providing conservation and protection, we also have an important contribution to make within and on behalf of **society**: culturally (preserving heritage), through **social interaction** and especially in terms of urban-rural relations.

7. **The Alpine Convention.** We have a **common legal instrument** – the Alpine Convention – in order to implement joint policies and measures.

>> Link: *www.alparc.org/the-protected-areas*

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ALPARC AND THE ALPINE CONVENTION

The Alpine Convention is an international treaty intended to ensure the long-term preservation of the natural ecosystem in the Alps and to promote sustainable development in the Alps by safeguarding the financial and cultural interests of the residents and the member countries.
The Alpine Convention has been ratified by the eight Alpine countries: Austria, France, Germany, Italy, the Principalities of Liechtenstein and Monaco, Slovenia and Switzerland.

ALPARC's activities are firmly rooted in the Alpine Convention and the accompanying implementing protocols. These activities are defined by ALPARC's International Steering Committee, which is made up of protected area representatives from all of the Alpine countries. The Committee's decisions are then approved by the Permanent Committee of the Alpine Convention. In conjunction with the Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention, via the Protected Areas Task Force, ALPARC works on all issues relating to the protected areas. This work involves developing databases, research and expertise in relation to Alpine conservation policies. ALPARC's primary objective is based on Article 12 of the Protocol on nature conservation and the countryside of the Alpine Convention:

Article 12:

The contracting parties shall take appropriate measures to establish a national and cross—border network of existing protected areas, biotopes and other sites which are protected or require protection.
They undertake to harmonise the objectives and measures that apply to the protected cross-border areas.

The aim of the protocol is to increase the environmental protection afforded to species, biotopes, habitats and landscapes. In order to achieve this, conservation measures throughout the Alps need to be harmonised.

>> Useful addresses: *www.alpconv.org*
www.alparc.org/the-alparc-network/alparc-and-the-alpine-convention

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ALPARC'S OBJECTIVES

The aim of the Alpine Network of Protected Areas (ALPARC) is to facilitate the sharing of expertise, lessons learned, techniques and methods between the managers of Alpine protected areas. The network also seeks to realise cooperation projects involving managers who want to provide consistent levels of conservation and sustainable development in the Alps in accordance with the Alpine Convention.
ALPARC provides support for cooperation under three broad headings: the thematic network, the physical network and the communication network.

- **THEMATIC NETWORK:**

The thematic network has been ALPARC's main focus since its inception in 1995. The network allows staff from protected areas across the Alps to discuss practical methods, to share expertise and lessons learned in relation to common themes, and to rise above linguistic and administrative divisions.

The network therefore seeks to promote regular technical discussions between the managers of protected areas and other associated organisations, through conferences, seminars, thematic training, workshops and field trips, but also through its publications, by compiling information on good practices and through other communication resources (Internet, Extranet).

The thematic network is built around the ALPARC working groups which bring together staff from the Alpine protected areas to discuss common work-related issues:

- Large mammals and raptors working group
- Large carnivores working group
- Habitats working group
- Sustainable tourism, cultural heritage and soft mobility working group
- Mountain agriculture and product quality working group
- Joint communication and environmental education working group
- Traditional skills and eco-buildings in the protected areas working group
- Water resources working group
- Databases and GIS working group

The number of working groups varies to reflect current needs. The groups work on specific projects such as reintroducing or monitoring certain species of wildlife, reception policy and managing tourist flows, joint communication strategies and managing the protected areas or even measures to combat climate change (soft mobility, eco-buildings). The work of the groups may lead to international projects (LIFE Bearded Vulture project, INTERREG Habitalp and Alpencom) or the creation of shared resources (travelling exhibitions, communication tools).

- **ECOLOGICAL NETWORK:**

One of the main aims of both ALPARC and the Alpine Convention is the creation of an ecological network. This network could be created by establishing ecological corridors between protected areas, through nature conservation agreements and sustainable land management.

In 2004, the Permanent Committee of the Alpine Convention commissioned ALPARC to carry out a study of the existing national and cross-border links between protected areas, which would then form the basis for the planned network. The findings of this study have confirmed the real potential in the Alps for creating a genuine ecological continuum, which will help to conserve the outstanding biodiversity in the Alps in the long term and will facilitate species migrations within the Alps and to/from neighbouring mountain ranges.

In 2006, the Alpine Convention set up a specific working group to examine this issue: the Ecological Network Platform. ALPARC, represented by the Protected Areas Task Force, together with other international partners (CIPRA, the International Scientific Committee on Research in the Alps (ISCAR), WWF), are actively contributing to this process. ALPARC is also working on the ground with the protected areas to make the project a reality. The project also receives financial assistance from a Swiss foundation (MAVA).

In 2008, the Protected Areas Task Force launched a large-scale European project to give a further boost to the creation of the ecological continuum (ECONNECT). The project is being undertaken together with CIPRA, ISCAR, the WWF and a number of protected areas.

- **COMMUNICATION NETWORK:**

ALPARC also works to **raise awareness** among and **inform** the general public and local residents about the importance of the natural and cultural heritage of the Alps and the need to preserve that heritage.
To this end, ALPARC and the Communication working group, with the assistance of the Protected Areas Task Force, have defined a common communication strategy for the Alpine protected areas together with style guidelines for the shared communication resources. Thus ALPARC is involved in developing a range of shared resources and communication campaigns for all protected areas in the network: the online portal (www.alparc.org), documentation, travelling exhibitions (Mythical Mountains, Return of the wildlife, information displays), standard communication resources for the general public (postcards, flyers, etc.), and most recently, a spectacular tool, ViViAlp – the Alps seen from the air. From 2008, this virtual tour of the protected areas in the Alps has been available in many visitor centres in the Alps and online via Google Earth (access via the www.alparc.org website).

>> Links: *www.alparc.org/the-alparc-network*
www.alparc.org/the-alparc-network/alparc-s-objectives

ALPARC'S PRIORITIES 2007-12

The main subjects for cooperation and discussion within the network during this period are:

- **Ecological network in the Alps**

Contributing to the creation of an ecological continuum by establishing ecological corridors, nature conservation agreements and sustainable land management.

- **Climate change and protected areas**

How climate change affects biodiversity, how we manage supplies of drinking water and business activities in the protected areas.

- **Managing the protected areas effectively**

Establishing methods and indicators for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of nature conservation and sustainable development measures in the Alpine protected areas.

- **Mobility and the protected areas**

Input and recommendations on soft mobility and access to the protected areas, including for visitors with reduced mobility.

- **Mountain partnership between the ALPS and CARPATHIANS**

Cooperation between protected area managers in the Alps and Carpathian Mountains on subjects of mutual interest: management plans, predators, habitats, NATURA 2000, developing tourism, etc.

ALPARC'S ACTIVITIES

ALPARC organises a whole range of conferences, seminars, workshops, public exhibitions, various publications, databases, maps, field trips, training and staff exchanges:

- Organising regular conferences, meetings and thematic workshops for managers and technical experts from the Alpine protected areas; also field trips and staff exchanges

- Supervising thematic working groups and involvement in establishing harmonised observation and species monitoring protocols

- Promoting and supporting joint projects; assisting with the creation of European projects and raising awareness among local inhabitants about their natural and cultural heritage

- Linguistic coordination via the multilingual coordination unit and a team of translators and interpreters

- Providing communication and information-sharing tools for managers and partners (bulletins, thematic and scientific reports, website, Extranet, etc.)

- Developing communication tools aimed at the general public: website, travelling exhibitions, flyers, educational material, book of tales and legends, library, virtual tour of the Alpine protected areas (ViViAlp), etc.

- Creating international coordination tools: databases, geographic information system (GIS) for the protected areas, glossary of environmental terms

- Providing training for a range of management personnel from the Alpine protected areas on issues relating to the protected areas and the Alps

- Coordinating and contributing to major Alpine projects (European territorial cooperation, Alpine Convention, research programmes)

>> Link: *www.alparc.org//our-actions*

ALPARC'S RESOURCES

Funding

The Protected Areas Task Force of the Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention receives funding from:

- the French Ministry for Ecology and Sustainable Development
- DIACT (Interministerial Delegation for Regional Planning and Competitiveness – France)
- the two French Alpine regions: Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur and Rhone-Alpes

for the purposes of managing ALPARC – the Alpine Network of Protected Areas – and carrying out the activities in its work programme.

The Alpine countries and states that are signatories to the Alpine Convention and the Alpine protected areas actively support and participate in joint activities. In some cases, they also contribute financially. Germany and Monaco provide practical and financial support for activities relating to the ecological network and cooperation between protected areas in the Alps and Carpathian Mountains.

Some protected areas apply the principle of shared responsibility, which in practice means heading up an activity, a programme or some other ALPARC project. This means they take on responsibility for the coordination, communication or financing elements of a particular activity or ALPARC working group.

Task Force

The Protected Areas Task Force is responsible for implementing ALPARC's two-year work programme, for coordinating and managing joint projects on behalf of the protected areas, and for organising events and meetings. The Task Force also works with the various partners to produce and manage publications, exhibitions and other ALPARC resources.

The Protected Areas Task Force also arranges the meetings of the ALPARC International Steering Committee. Every two years, in conjunction with a protected area, the Task Force organises the General Assembly for all Alpine protected areas. In order to do all of this, there is a permanent team of five multilingual staff plus short-term staff who oversee specific projects.

Office

All of ALPARC's activities are coordinated by the Protected Areas Task Force, which is part of the Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention. The office of the Protected Areas Task Force is the Maison des parcs et de la montagne in Chambéry, France.

>> Links: *www.alparc.org/the-alparc-network/how-alparc-works*
www.alparc.org/the-alparc-network/funding

HOW ALPARC IS STRUCTURED

Every protected area that falls under the scope of the Alpine Convention or is associated with the Convention is automatically a member of the Alpine Network of Protected Areas (ALPARC). There is no subscription or registration fee. Members can choose how actively they contribute to different activities, in accordance with their own needs and fields of interest. The network currently comprises 900-odd protected areas which cover approximately 25% of the Alps (as defined by the Alpine Convention).

ALPARC's objectives are defined by the **International Steering Committee** (ISC), which is made up of a selection of directors of Alpine protected areas who reflect the variety and number of protected areas in each country. The International Steering Committee defines the broad thrust of the international work programme in accordance with the priorities and requirements of the protected areas.

All key decisions and the choice of key subjects for cooperation are submitted to the **General Assembly** which is held once every two years and brings together representatives from all the Alpine protected areas.

The **Permanent Committee of the Alpine Convention** approves the work programme devised by the International Steering Committee.

National monitoring groups support the work of the Protected Areas Task Force and help to implement joint projects via their contacts in the different Alpine countries and regions.

The Protected Areas Task Force is a multilingual team who come from a variety of backgrounds. The Task Force implements the work programme activities that have been agreed for ALPARC.

ALPARC has a **President** and two vice-presidents who chair the International Steering Committee. They also represent ALPARC for official purposes.

>> Link: *www.alparc.org/the-alparc-network/how-alparc-works*

THE CARPATHIAN NETWORK OF PROTECTED AREAS

In recent years, the Carpathian countries have produced an international agreement similar to the Alpine Convention that is designed to ensure the conservation of the Carpathian Mountains. The countries in question are: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, the Slovak Republic and Ukraine.

One core feature of the convention is the creation of a Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA) modelled on the Alpine network.

ALPARC has contributed significantly to the creation of the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA). A whole range of activities were organised jointly by the two networks (seminars, workshops, staff exchanges, creation of communication tools, strategic work programmes).

The Carpathian Network was officially established in December 2006 in an agreement between the governments of all the Carpathian countries. An International Steering Committee has also drawn up a work programme and is working in conjunction with other international institutions (including ALPARC) to organise the General Assembly.

Many issues affect both the Carpathians and the Alps, particularly in the fields of managing the natural environment and sustainable development. The similarities have become more pronounced since four of the countries joined the European Union in 2004 (e.g. NATURA 2000 network). Both mountain ranges (Alps and Carpathians) are part of the same European biogeographic region and have a common border.

>> Useful addresses: *www.carpathianparks.org*
www.carpathianconvention.org

FOCUS ON:
THE ECOLOGICAL NETWORK IN THE ALPS

The Alps: Nature Unbound

The Alps span eight countries, from the Mediterranean shores of Southern France to Slovenia. They harbour an extraordinary diversity of habitats and species and are considered one of the most important biodiversity hotspots in central Europe. Nature extending boundlessly over valleys and peaks? Yes, maybe...

Nature in the balance

The alpine landscape is a mosaic of different habitats. Meadows, woodlands, water courses and open prairie, but also farming infrastructure such as ditches, terraces and hedges. Incredibly varied spaces occur alongside one another and are inhabited by the most diverse species.

Linked habitats support biodiversity

In the course of a year or a life cycle, the different elements of the landscape provide animals with shelter or food, as well as reproduction and wintering sites. During their migrations some animals cover long distances and sometimes must overcome obstacles. Therefore linking the different ranges and resources – thus making them accessible – is of key importance for the survival of populations and species.

The intensification of human activities is leading to an ever-increasing fragmentation and urbanisation of the alpine landscape. The incessant increase of infrastructure, the intensive land use and the growing pressure of urbanisation cause habitats to shrink, fragment into smaller, isolated areas, or disappear altogether. If a living space becomes too small, or if its connections to other areas are cut off, the survival chances of species decrease rapidly since small, isolated populations adapt less effectively to extreme environmental conditions. This can lead to the disappearance of populations. However, if several small populations are distributed along connection elements, such as corridors, their survival chances improve, because local die-offs can be compensated for by immigration. The danger of genetic impoverishment due to inbreeding can also be counterbalanced through immigration of single individuals, however sporadic.

Human and animal Migration

Near-natural, well-maintained and sufficiently large habitats constitute the core areas of an ecological network. These core areas can be connected to one another, for example, by “ecological corridors”.

Ecological corridors are linear connection units allowing the passage of species between different living spaces, thus enabling genetic exchange between populations. Corridors are made of landscape elements and small features such as field ditches, wooded strips or forest edges, dry stone walls, and rock piles. Sustainably managed farm and woodland as well as small but well-preserved biotopes can also function as steppingstones in a corridor system.

Especially in areas where human land use created barriers, connecting entities must be preserved or re-established. This goal is best attained through sustainable and environmentally friendly land use as well as the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature rather than restrictions or prohibitions. Only through these measures, the unique natural heritage of the Alps can be preserved for future generations.

Networking can also entail risks: endemic species, i.e. species occurring only in the Alps, can be threatened by invasive species dispersing along connecting elements.
The quality of ecological corridors plays a crucial role in minimising this risk.

Macro to micro: different levels of intervention

Well-connected habitats are important beyond the local scale. Some alpine species need wide, natural areas, for example large carnivores as the wolf, the lynx, and the bear. This also applies to large ungulates such as the deer or large birds such as the bearded vulture or the golden eagle. To conserve these species in the whole Alps, collaboration is needed. Concrete action for the establishment of an ecological network, however, will occur predominantly at the local level.

The impact of global phenomena such as climate change is increasingly significant and requires therefore the development of a pan-alpine strategy. Establishing an ecological network can be a cornerstone in a coherent response to global change. Facilitating the passage of species displaced by shifting climatic zones will help them find new suitable habitats and move their range, thereby improving their chances of survival.

Alpine countries contribute to global nature conservation

The idea of ecological networks is nothing new. Many conventions, agreements and initiatives are already in existence. Internationally, all alpine countries have committed to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity through the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Since mountain regions belong to the areas in the world with the highest biodiversity, ecological networks extending over the whole alpine arc can provide an important contribution to fulfilling global commitments.

At the European level, things are getting more concrete: a pan-European ecological network is currently being established, in which the Alps will play a key role. Identified Natura 2000 sites in EU countries are important building blocks of this project.

Nature knows no borders. International collaboration is therefore of particular importance for ecological networks. Alpine countries work with conservation organisations and the scientific community in the framework of the Alpine convention for the implementation of ecological networks. Alpine protected areas play a similarly important role. They are often the last wide-area refuges for plants and animals and constitute therefore important core areas in an alpine ecological network. To

fulfil their nature protection task in the long term, they must be connected to one another, thus enabling undisturbed natural processes.

Not "just" networking

Networking measures make life better for animals and plants...and for people!
- Green areas lining a stream contribute effectively to flood protection;
- The revitalisation of water courses can turn jogging or a Sunday hike into an exciting nature experience;
- Sustainably managed forests provide effective protection against avalanches;
- In heavily settled valley floors, ecological corridors act as "green lungs". They provide better air , attract tourists, and represent an ideal recreational area;
- A well-structured landscape can define the character of an entire region, as is the case for terraced vineyards or hedgerow landscapes. They are an unmistakable part of the local identity and play an important role in tourism.

Connectivity can often be improved with minimal effort in association with other simple measures. As an example, postponing roadside mowing allows the growth of springtime and summer plants, thereby providing food for bees and other insects.

Beyond the Alps

As we work to establish or maintain ecological networks in the Alps, we cannot neglect adjacent mountain ranges. The Alps-Carpathians corridor, for example, is vital for large carnivores. Connections to the Balkan mountain areas, to the Apennines, the French Central Massif, the Pyrenees, and the Jura play a key
role for the dissemination of many species.

>> Links: *www.alparc.org/the-alparc-network/a-spatial-network*
www.alparc.org/our-actions/an-ecological-network-in-the-alps
www.alpine-ecological-network.org

FOCUS ON:
VIVIALP – THE ALPS FROM THE AIR… AND ONLINE!

Discover the Alps from the air!
Fly and learn more about protected areas, nature, fauna, flora, cultural heritage and society in the Alps.
Fly and discover differences and similarities between the various protected areas.

The virtual visit of the alpine protected areas is a tool which was developed for the Visitor Centres of the protected areas by a dozen of protected areas, including the Swiss National Park, in the frame of the project ALPENCOM (2005-2008) of the Interreg IIIB Alpine Space Programme. This tool is now also available online, through Google Earth.

For more information, see www.alparc.org/resources/virtual-visit-vivialp