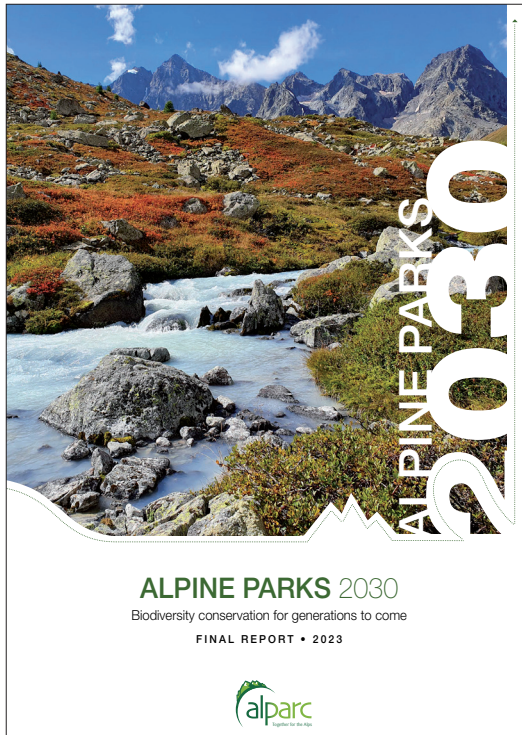


## Summary Alpine Parks 2030 – Biodiversity conservation for generations to come – Final Report 2023

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The decision of the UN Biodiversity Conference (COP 15), in December 2022, coincided with the completion of work on this report. While, as of July 2022, the IPBES (Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services) generally expressed pessimism about the evolution of global biodiversity, the decision of COP 15 to protect 30% of the earth's marine and terrestrial biodiversity by 2030 is a clear call for change and more effective protection of biodiversity by protected areas (PAs). For the Alps, with a large number of very heterogeneous PAs, this decision demands more coordinated strategies between the Alpine countries in favour of PAs within the framework of the Alpine Convention.

The Alpine PAs currently represent a very large mosaic of different types even within the same categories and denominations. Harmonisation of management standards has not yet been achieved and does not always enjoy strong political support. Of the 28.5% of PAs within the Alpine Convention, only a third are effectively protected, or around 10% of the entire surface area. The path to achieving the COP15 goal is still long and complex as not all PAs have an IUCN category that would facilitate the strategy. Furthermore, there are important land-use conflicts that are exacerbated by a deteriorating climate situation.

In general, the Alps are still lacking large strong PAs. Strong PAs are defined as either having a IUCN category I–IV or according to the ALPARC definition are Nature reserves, National Parks or most Italian Nature parks. According to the analysis we completed within this work, it seems difficult to establish such large surfaces with a strong protection status due to the historic and often intensive land use practices of the Alpine territory. The solution can only come from targeted strategies and measures, such as stronger protection at lower altitudes, better connection between PAs through adapted measures, and effective defragmentation (ecological connectivity). In the best-case scenario, these solutions would be negotiated with stakeholders and the local population to improve the area's protection status wherever possible through more consistent rules for Alpine land use that include the needs for intact habitats.

Expression of the *ecological significance* of the existing and future PAs was one of the most difficult features to define for the Alpine territories as Alps-wide data for biodiversity and species distribution are often not available. The integration of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) and Nature 2000 sites, both of which reflect ecological importance of the concerned territory, helped to fill this gap. More than two-thirds of the strong PAs of the Alps overlap with those KBA's.

Our most important conclusions are: Alpine PAs are too small, too high, and, especially in the case of the strong PAs, not well enough interconnected; they also lack sufficient common management approaches beyond regions and national borders. All of these factors contribute to inadequate ecological process protection in the Alps, and Wilderness remains an exception in the Alpine space occupying only a very low percentage of the surface area (0.4% of the Alpine Convention perimeter, IUCN Ia and Ib).

The most promising approach to maintaining biodiversity in the long run is to promote more ecological connectivity within a global planning framework of connectivity combined with local actions that include stakeholders and the local population.

To achieve the 30% goal, three essential strategies are needed: a) to identify all potentially ecologically interesting areas with potential to be protected and integrate those areas into spatial planning procedures; b) to be creative and innovative concerning the forms and types of PAs to be adapted for local or regional situations with the clear condition that they must contribute to effective biodiversity protection, and last but not least c) to incorporate the local population in the planning and management questions. We will not sustainably achieve the 30% goal in the Alpine region without our population!

The final section of the report tried to develop suggestions for a future PAs scenario in the Alps. It seems very difficult to achieve the 30% goal of effective PAs within the existing network. Success would require a significant

increase (by at least 25%) in the ecologically most valuable spaces that combine important extension, a high protection status, a well-balanced altitudinal distribution, and a high degree of connectivity criteria with a very low presence of infrastructure or settlements (open space). Furthermore, addressing the criterion of *efficient protection* requires us to provide a real protection status to all so-called *weak PAs*, to guarantee that all KBA's are also covered by the same (strong) protection status, and, finally, to ensure a high degree of ecological connectivity.

As the probability of the implementation of these important measures within the existing framework is low and unrealistic in the near future, we enhanced our approach with a final spatial planning simulation to identify areas potentially interesting for the 30x30 goal (30% of the world's terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine areas to be in effective protection and management by 2030) beyond the existing protected area network. The results of important projects of the last years (mainly INTERREG Alpine Space) informed our proposal for a spatial planning system to reach the 30x30 goal of COP 15. Based on the combination of areas identified as ecologically favourable by this report with areas having a low degree of fragmentation and spatial development, new areas were identified with potential for integration into the PAs network. Those with ecological significance yet lacking a strong protection status could be considered in a spatial planning strategy integrating the 30% goal of effective PAs in the Alps.

We are aware that this goal of 30% is based on national boundaries. Nevertheless, it makes perfect sense to apply it to the Alps as a common biogeographical region unified by an international treaty, the Alpine Convention.

This report illustrates the state of the PAs with their most important, primarily quantitative characteristics, delivers data for future expertise and studies, and, finally, proposes strategic intervention measures to reach the 30x30 goal of better protection of biodiversity for generations to come.

#### Further information

<https://alparc.org/parks2030>