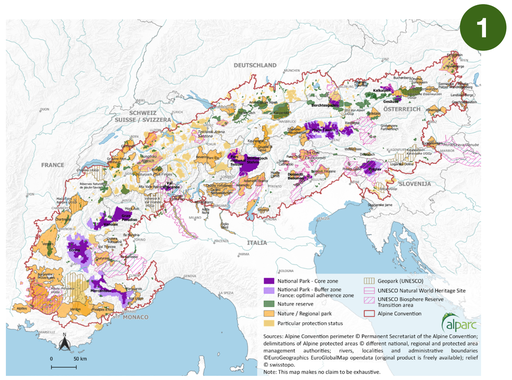
ALPINE PARKS 2030 Biodiversity conservation for generations to come

ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION AND PERSPECTIVES FOR THE ALPINE NETWORK OF PROTECTED AREAS

A LONG-TERM GOAL

The establishment of a coherent transnational spatial network of Protected Areas with harmonised objectives and management that meets the specific ecological, economic, social, and cultural requirements of the Alps.



1 PROTECTED AREAS IN THE ALPINE CONVENTION AREA

The current situation

The Alps encompass a highly diverse system of landscapes and ecological processes, some of which have arisen from their geological, climatological and biological evolution, and parts of which have been shaped by hundreds of years of human habitation and land-use.

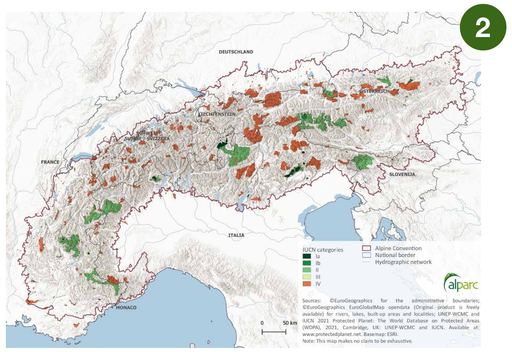
Alpine Protected Areas (APA)

About 28.5% of the territory within the Alpine Convention has a status of Protected Area but only around 10,4% are currently under a strong protection status (IUCN I-IV).

Nevertheless, they represent a large mosaic of different situations and types even within the same categories and denominations.The harmonisation of management standards has not yet been achieved and does not always get strong political support.

Generally

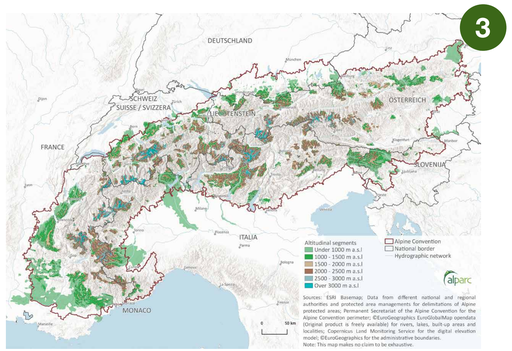
Alpine Protected Areas are too small, too high, and, especially in the case of the strong Protected Areas, not well enough interconnected; they also lack sufficient common management approaches beyond regions and national borders. High biodiversity not always coincide with the protection status of the area. “Spatial potential” for improvement of biodiversity protection is needed to achieve the 30x30 goal defined by COP 15 Biodiversity in December 2022.



2 IUCN CATEGORIES IA, IB, II, III AND IV

Ecological process protection is directly linked to a sufficient surface area and the level of protection of the areas. Human activity should be reduced to a minimum, or to only limited traditional activities that respect natural cycles. A sustainable resource management is the condition of any anthropogenic presence in the area, if process protection should be successful.

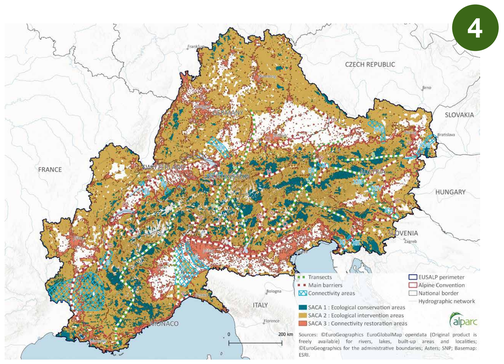
Generally, large Strong Protected Areas are concentrated in the central parts of the Alps, as strong protection of large areas in the margins and lower Alpine regions is lacking. They mostly concern the 13 Alpine National Parks and some larger Nature Reserves, including some relatively Strong Protected Nature Parks.



3 ALTITUDINAL SEGMENTS OF THE ALPINE PROTECTED AREAS

The elevation is correlated with the protection status; the stronger the protection status of a single park or reserve, the higher the elevation. E.g., two-thirds of the total surface area of all 13 National Parks of the Alps are located over 2,000 m. a.s.l.

Biodiversity is present at all altitudinal levels, but for the Alps, lower and mid-altitudinal levels play a key role. Species and habitat protection exclusive to higher altitudes to avoid land-use conflicts is not sustainable for the protection of biodiversity on the long term.

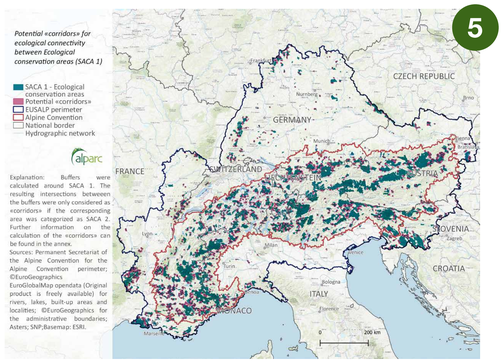


4 STRATEGIC ALPINE CONNECTIVITY AREAS IN THE EUSALP MACRO-REGION

Ecological connectivity can be improved by a strong protection of the so-called Ecological Conservation Areas (ECA’s) as core elements. These are areas where connectivity is still well functioning. Potential corridors are the starting point to create a network of well-connected patches of ECAs.

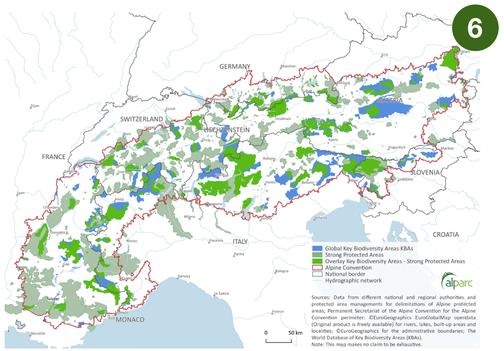
Ecological intervention areas (EIA) are territories in which to create connections, often only needing a reduction in protection measures in order to allow the migration of species, while Connectivity Restoration Areas (CRA) need important ad-hoc measures to keep the last remaining corridors of migration open.

Connectivity areas are regions with a strategic interest for connectivity. Often, they present the last ecological connections and migration corridors to neighbour mountain ranges, or between alpine regions of high ecological value.



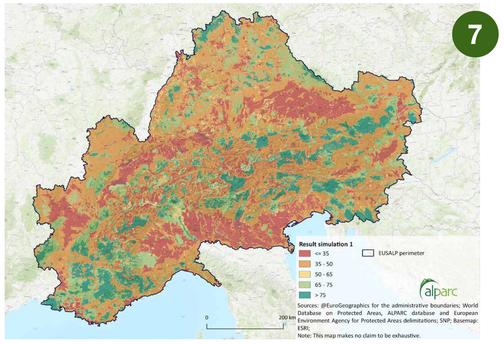
5 ECOLOGICAL NETWORK IN THE ALPS

Currently, 61% of the Ecological Conservation Areas (ECA’s) are located in existing Protected Areas (within the perimeter of the Alpine Convention), and 48% of the existing Protected Areas are entirely or partly located in Ecological Conservation Areas. This shows a high redundancy, and potential for further biodiversity protection by creating buffers of protected areas around such regions wherever possible. This approach is probably more realistic than the creation of new protected areas.



6 KEY BIODIVERSITY AREAS AND PROTECTED AREAS IN THE ALPS

Key biodiversity areas are regions with a high degree of biodiversity. Not always do they coincide with protected areas. They constitute a high potential for further biodiversity protection, if protected areas with a Strong Protection status are established in those regions.



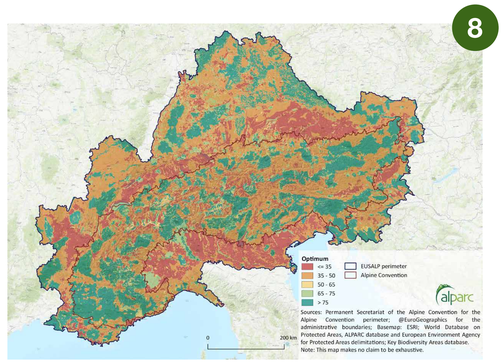
7 IDENTIFICATION OF ALPINE ECOLOGICALLY FAVOURABLE AREAS (EFA)

EUSALP Area

More than 28% of Ecologically Favourable Areas (EFA: cat. 65-75% + cat. >75%) for nature protection (either already protected or with a high potential for protection).

Alpine Convention Area

More than 38% of Ecologically Favourable Areas (EFA: cat. 65-75% + cat. >75%) for nature protection (either already protected or with a high potential for protection).



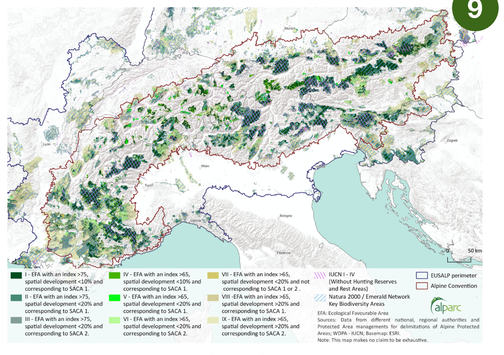
8 APPROACHING THE 30% GOAL OF ALPINE PROTECTED AREAS NEEDS STRONGER PROTECTION AND MORE CONNECTIVITY

To achieve the 30% goal for efficiently protected areas, in accordance with the COP15 Biodiversity decision (Montreal 2022), important improvements would be necessary, such as:

- 25 % Increase of all protected area categories considered as Strong Protection (IUCN I, II, nature reserves, Italian nature parks) according to IUCN and ALPARC definitions
- Providing a protection status to all Key Biodiversity Areas
- Changing the SACA 1 (ecological connectivity) areas in concrete connected and interlinked areas
- Providing a protection status to all weak protection areas, including Protected Areas smaller than 100 ha

As these improvements don’t seem realistically achievable, a further step identified the most favourable areas for ecological conservation by:

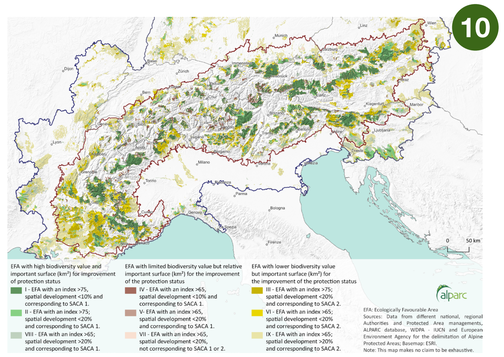
1. *Analysing the current situation of potential protected surface areas in ecologically interesting sites by using parameters related to spatial development; ecological connectivity from former projects (such as ALPBIONET2030 and OpenSpaceAlps and the results of the current analysis presented in map 7).*
2. *Assessing whether the identified areas are also characterised by a high degree of biodiversity, with the help of KBA and Natura 2000 sites.*
3. *Overlaying the resulting areas with existing Strong Protected Areas (IUCN I – IV), to determine which areas are still potentially valuable for further protection measures.*



9 POTENTIAL PLANNING AREAS FOR BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION ACCORDING TO BIODIVERSITY VALUE AND STRONG PROTECTION STATUS

The map shows the distribution of strong protected areas within the Ecologically Favourable Areas (EFA) covered by surface areas with high biodiversity level (or value) presented by the KBA and Natura 2000 layer.

This allows to identify areas of the different levels of the ecological spatial planning model for the Alps according to already identified areas of high biodiversity (KBA and Natura 2000) and the existence of a pre-established protection status within those areas. Surfaces within these areas (cat. I-IX) still not credited with a protection status (IUCN category I-IV) are constituting the potential for further protected areas to achieve the 30x30 goal of the Biodiversity COP 15 (Montréal, 2022). Areas that already fulfill all the conditions of this goal: those with high biodiversity value (in our case: covered by KBA or Natura 2000 and Emerald) and a strong protection status are currently representing only 7,6% (14,609 km2) of the Alps according to the Alpine Convention perimeter.



10 POTENTIAL PLANNING AREAS FOR BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION ACCORDING TO BIODIVERSITY VALUE, STRONG PROTECTION STATUS, AND AVAILABLE SURFACE, TO ACHIEVE COP 15’s 30X30 GOAL

While on an Alps-wide level, and according to the overall figures for the Alps, it is theoretically possible to achieve 37.72% of surface area protection for the Alps by transforming the whole surface of the 9 EFA categories into “efficient” protected areas, it would be interesting to see in which categories the most efficient surface increase of alpine protected areas could be operated.

The map shows the results of the different categories, including their biodiversity value and the extension of existing protected areas (and consequently, the current potential for further protection measures) leading to three groups:

- The group with the highest biodiversity value has an overall surface area of 29,825 km² (Cat. I, II, VIII), from which between 47 and 76% of the surface area is still not given an adequate protection status.
- The second group, which is more limited in surface, but still has a high biodiversity value, provides an overall surface area of 9,815 km² (Cat. IV, V, VII), and an existing potential for new protected areas between 83 and 88%.
- The final group, with lower biodiversity indices, has an important overall surface area of 32,408 km² (Cat. III, VI, IX). As only 4 - 7% of this category is already (strongly) protected, the potential for further protected areas is situated between 93 and 96%, considering nevertheless the lower indices for biodiversity.

alparc Together for the Alps

Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection

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