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Natura 2000 - Summary

What is Natura 2000?

Biological diversity

Natura 2000 is a network of more than 26,000 protected sites all over Europe. Its task is to protect animal and plant species of European significance and their habitats for us and future generations. That makes it a project of immense importance, since the natural diversity of landscapes and species constitutes an indispensable requirement for the preservation of life on earth. In order to protect endangered animal and plant species, we therefore also have to protect and sustainably manage their major habitats and to ensure that they exist in sufficient number and size.

Two EU directives

The foundation for this European network of protected sites is provided by two EU directives (Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC): the Birds Directive, whose central aim is to protect all wild bird species in Europe, and the Habitats Directive, which focuses on the preservation of natural habitats and wild animals and plants.

The Natura 2000 network of protected sites

With its accession to the EU, Austria has committed itself to implementing these two directives for the well-being of its indigenous animals, plants and habitats and, in consequence, to defining a network of protected sites. In accordance with Austrian law, the actual selection of the individual sites was made by the Federal Provinces.

European Protection Areas

Following this procedure, the competent authorities in Lower Austria selected 20 Natura 2000 sites under the Habitats Directive and 16 sites under the Birds Directive. Together these areas account for approx. 23% of Lower Austria's territory. Pursuant to Section 9 of the Lower Austrian Nature Conservation Act, they were declared by ordinance to be "European Protection Areas".

Preservation measures

The aim of the Natura 2000 programme is to preserve the natural characteristics of these protected areas by implementing appropriate measures. Thus an important effort will be to initiate the measures required to preserve or restore such characteristics, for example by promoting near-natural forest management or extensive grassland management.

What are the changes involved?

Generally, a protected area is not a restricted area. This means it can be continued to be used as before - with the intention to protect the diversity of landscapes and species. Any changes in its use which may adversely affect the protected animals, plants and habitats (= protected objects) in the relevant area - for example a more intensive agricultural use or the discontinuation of traditional agricultural use - are subject to the so-called "deterioration ban". In order to prevent a deterioration in the condition of the protected objects, management requirements are agreed together with the respective farmers or agricultural enterprises, which will be compensated via area-based premiums. Hence, agricultural and forest management (e.g. mowing times, fertilisation, use of plant protectants) in Lower Austria is not regulated by rigid legal provisions, but primarily by way of more flexible private-law agreements. With regard to projects going beyond mere management measures (such as the construction of a detached house or the erection of a new flood protection dam), it is to be considered whether such project would significantly affect the protected objects. The question whether any plans or projects might have such significant effects has to be determined in the context of an assessment procedure which may go as far as to include a nature impact assessment.

Natura 2000 The Lower Austrian Approach

Management plans

All European Protection Areas in Lower Austria will be covered by separate management plans, a summary of which is provided in this brochure. More detailed information is available on the Federal Province's Natura 2000 website (www.noel.gv.at/natura2000). The management plan contains an outline of the appropriate maintenance, development and preservation measures for the respective area. It describes, for example, those management efforts which are required to maintain a "favourable state" of conservation, such as the regular mowing of purple moor grass.

Regional strategy

Because of its geographic situation and its cultural landscape which has grown over centuries, Lower Austria has a large variety of habitats and species worthy of protection. The management of these large conservation areas constitutes a particular challenge, which was met in Lower Austria by developing an innovative regional strategy. The 21 Natura 2000 sites (overlapping protected habitats and birds areas are treated as one site) are assigned in whole to one of the five main regions of the Federal Province's development concept („Weinviertel", „Waldviertel", „Mostviertel", „Industrieviertel" and the Lower Austrian central region „NÖ Mitte"). This facilitates co-ordination with regional conditions and developments, such as tourist facilities or infrastructure planning measures and municipal development.

Level-based approach

By applying a structured top-down procedure a uniform approach is followed for all European Protection Areas. Standardised basic principles for the management of the individual areas were determined at the provincial level. Cross-regional issues (e.g. aspects relating to the time schedule) will be dealt with uniformly at the level of the five main regions. Specific measures will finally be identified at the area level. Hence, cross-cutting aspects relating to several areas need not be addressed individually. This approach provides a clear-cut structure and enables swifter decision-making processes.



Risk analysis

An important first step of management planning was to perform a risk analysis for all Natura 2000 sites in Lower Austria. In the context of this analysis, the risk of a deterioration in the state of conservation was assessed on the basis of the protected objects' sensitivity per se and their sensitivity in connection with the use of their habitats and was ranked according to urgency. In this first effort, particular importance was attached to risk factors from agricultural and forestry use. The risk analysis is to ensure the prioritisation of those measures which are required to counteract deteriorations that can be foreseen at the present time. These measures will be implemented in the form of area-specific focal projects and measures.

Natura 2000 Internet page

The Lower Austrian management plans display a high level of flexibility. Like nature itself, the measures to conserve it are not fixed, but have to be adjusted to new developments and findings. The latest versions of the individual management plans are available at the Web site of the Federal Province of Lower Austria.

Natura 2000 on-line maps (Atlas of Lower Austria)

The Province of Lower Austria's Natura 2000 Internet page provides citizens with interactive maps which offer an insight into the Natura 2000 sites and enable citizens to establish at any time to what extent they and their properties are affected.

WEITERFÜHRENDE INFORMATIONEN

📄 Links

📄 [Environment fact sheet: Natura 2000](#)

📄 Ihre Kontaktstelle des Landes für Natura 2000

**Amt der NÖ Landesregierung
Abteilung Naturschutz**

Mag. Arno Aschauer E-Mail: post.ru5@noel.gv.at
Tel: 02742/9005-15169, Fax: 02742/9005-15220
3109 St. Pölten, Landhausplatz 1, Haus 16

📄 [Lageplan, Adressen aller Dienststellen](#)