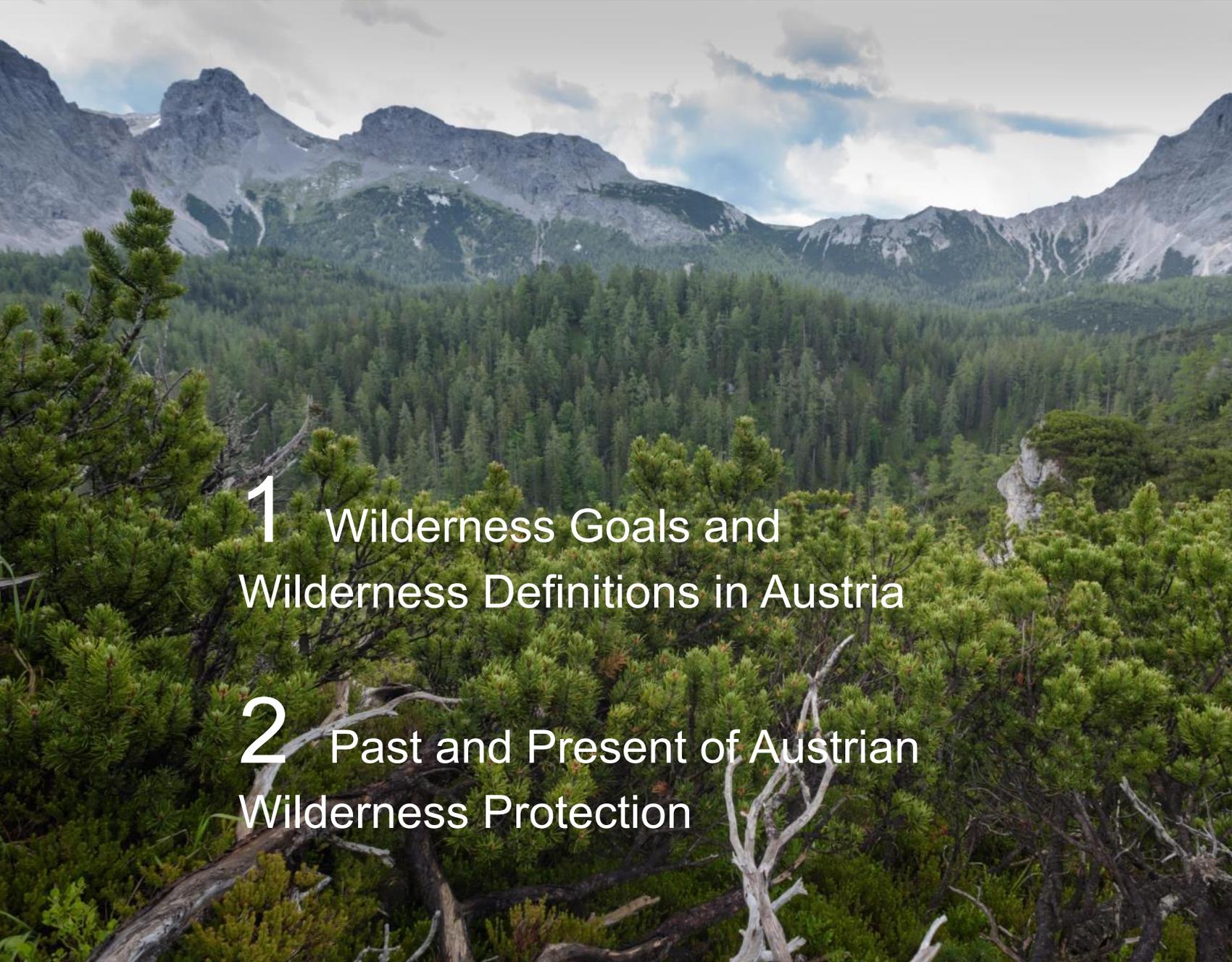


Protection of Wilderness and Natural Processes in Austria

Dr. Bernhard Kohler, Protected Areas and Forests
Team, WWF Austria

EUROPARC Central and Eastern Europe and IUCN-
WCPA Workshop on Wilderness Definition and its
Protection in Central and Eastern European Countries

Praha – Průhonice, 28th February-1st March

A wide-angle photograph of a mountainous landscape. In the foreground, there are several pine trees with green needles and some bare, grey branches. The middle ground is filled with a dense, green forest of coniferous trees. In the background, there are large, rugged mountains with grey rock faces and patches of snow or light-colored rock. The sky is overcast with grey and white clouds.

1 Wilderness Goals and
Wilderness Definitions in Austria

2 Past and Present of Austrian
Wilderness Protection



1

Wilderness Goals and Wilderness Definitions in Austria



Wilderness Definitions used in Austria

„Natural development takes place on 2% of the territory“

In its Target no. 10, the new **Austrian Biodiversity Strategy**, which has been developed in a broad stakeholder process in 2014, states that:

...by 2020+...,natural development takes places on 2% of Austria´s territory “

Seeing that **humans are interfering with natural processes almost everywhere in our country**, except in strictly protected areas, this must be read as a **call for the establishment of such areas**

In fact, the sentence was a compromise. If conservation NGOs would have had their will during the stakeholder process, it would simply have read: **“2% of Austria is wilderness”**, but this was not acceptable to landowner- and land user-representatives. So the above, rather vague formula was eventually chosen. Still, it means **that protection the of natural processes and wilderness** are definitely on the Austrian conservation agenda





Wilderness Definitions used in Austria

Where in Austria do we have legally-based process protection?



In a strict sense only in a few places:

- the core zones of Austria's **6 national parks**: Hohe Tauern, Kalkalpen, Gesäuse, Thayatal, Donau-Auen, Neusiedler See-Seewinkel
- the core zone of Austria's only **wilderness area**, the Wilderness area Dürrenstein

So **which definitions and criteria** regarding process protection and wilderness do apply to these areas?



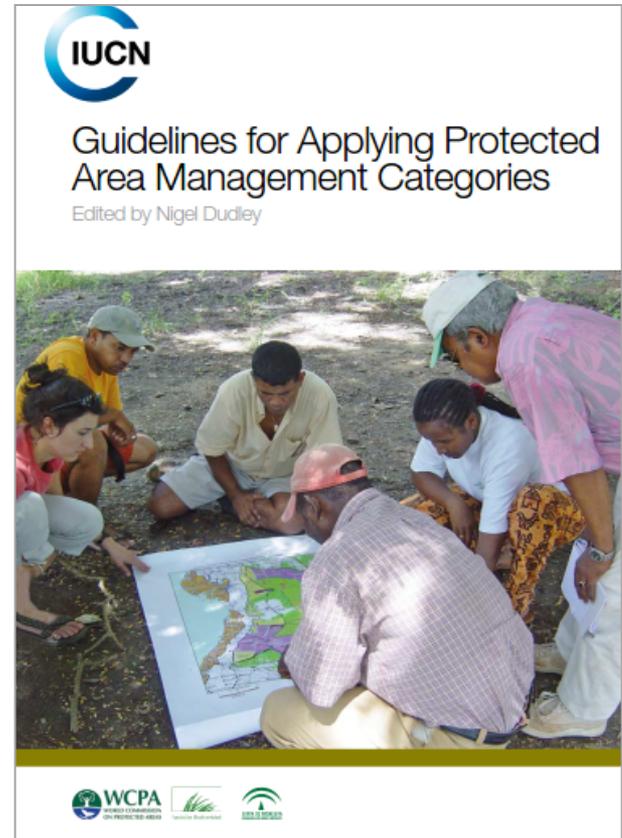
Wilderness Definitions used in Austria

IUCN Protected Area Management Categories

In the early 1990ies, the Austrian ministry for the environment took the decision that **Austrian National Parks must conform to the IUCN Protected Area Management Categories** - they have to fulfil the criteria for **category II areas**, and they should seek official recognition by IUCN

Category II: National park

Category II protected areas are 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.



This means – among others – that the parks should have a **core zone with non-intervention management on approximately 75% of their area**



Wilderness Definitions used in Austria

IUCN Protected Area Management Categories

This created some difficulties – mainly for those **parks, that had been set up earlier on different premises**

- **Nationalpark Hohe Tauern** (laws for the Carinthian part written in 1981, for the Salzburg part in 1984, for the Tyrolean part in 1992)
- **Nationalpark Nockberge** (established in 1987)

These parks had core zones from the outset, but **with little or no restriction on traditional land-use, like grazing, hunting and forestry**





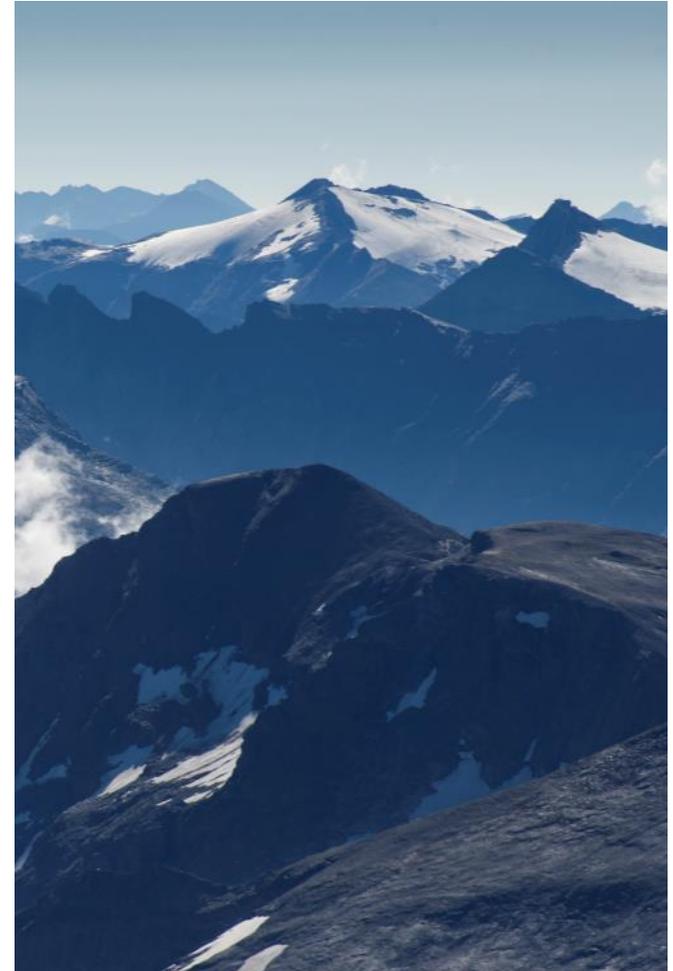
Wilderness Definitions used in Austria

IUCN Protected Area Management Categories

To solve the problem, both parks tried to **secure intervention-free core zones through contracts and compensation payments for landowners**

Despite intensive negotiations, no agreement with landowners could be reached in Nockberge National Park. So in 2004, the Carinthian National Park Committee decided to **reclassify the park as Biosphere Park**, a process that was completed in 2012

In Hohe Tauern, contracts were set up step by step. Eventually, **sufficiently large tracts of the original core zones were secured**, so that all three parts received **IUCN recognition** (Carinthia in 2001, Tyrol and Salzburg in 2006). „IUCN-cores“ now account for approx. **80% of the original core zones**



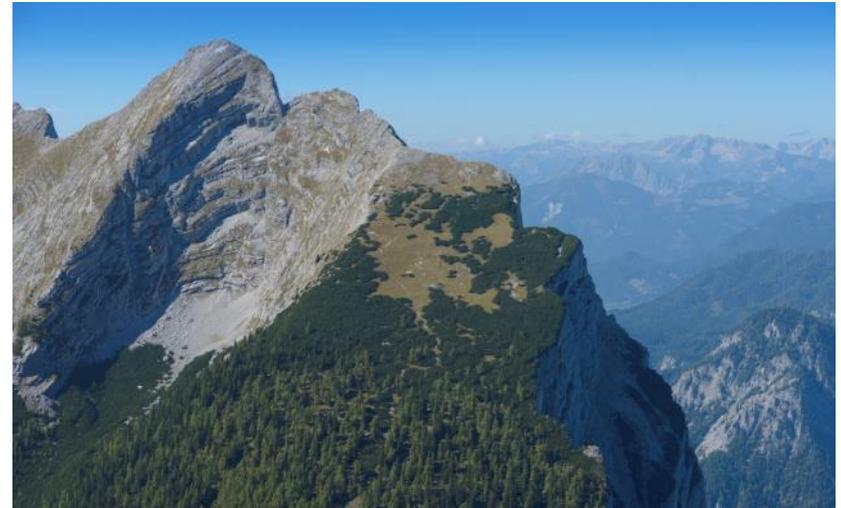


Wilderness Definitions used in Austria

IUCN Protected Area Management Categories

All other Austrian National Parks were **designed from the outset so as to conform to IUCN-category II criteria**. Still, the **75% rule** is not fully implemented everywhere, since many parks were granted **transition periods** of up to **30 years**, during which they still can carry out restoration activities. So full non-intervention management is **not yet** applied to all core areas

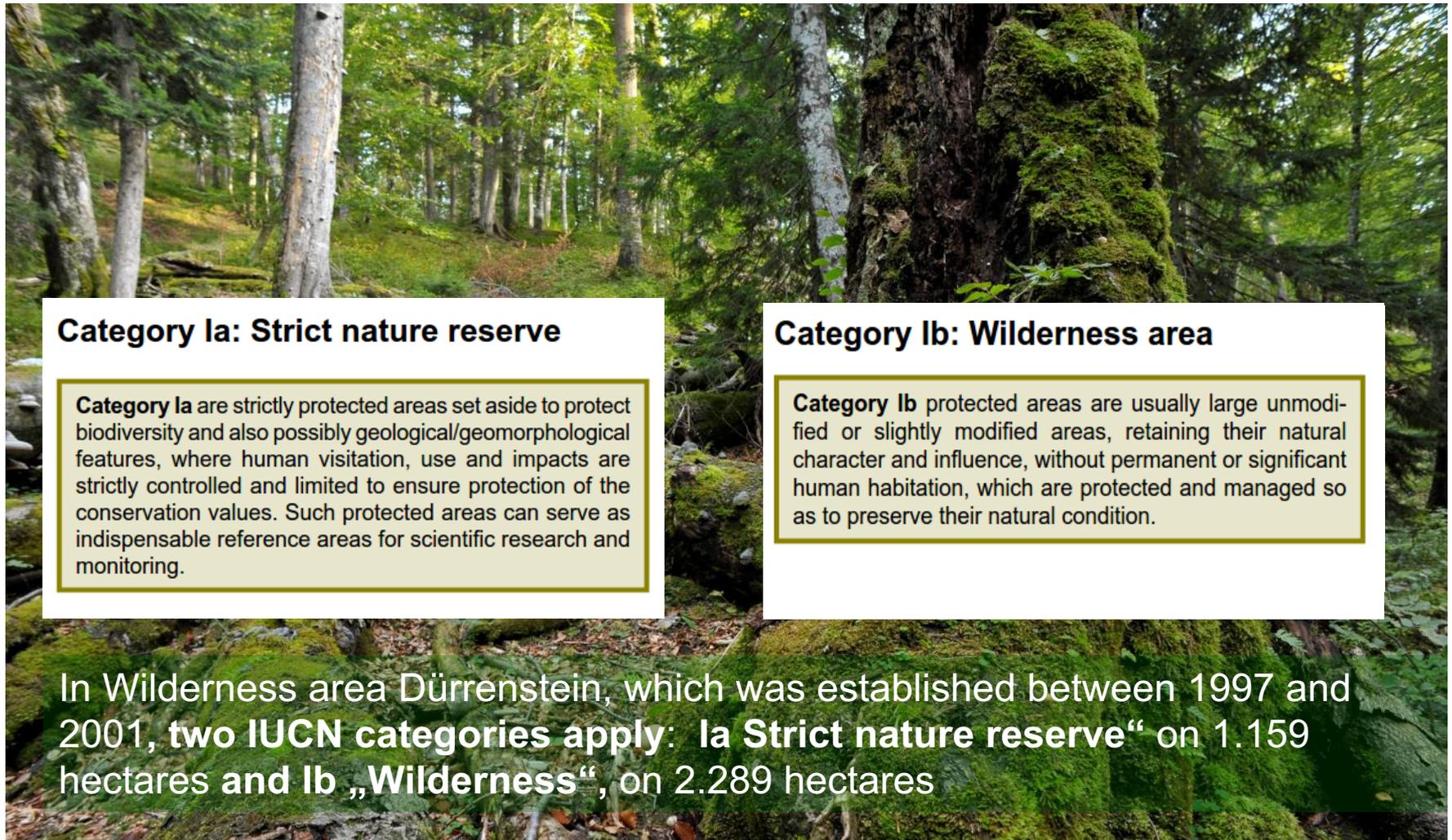
The 75% rule has **not been applied to National Park Neusiedler See-Seewinkel**. Here a 50% rule is observed, since the park protects important steppe areas, that **cannot be successfully managed with strict non-intervention** under present day conditions





Wilderness Definitions used in Austria

IUCN Protected Area Management Categories



Category Ia: Strict nature reserve

Category Ia are strictly protected areas set aside to protect biodiversity and also possibly geological/geomorphological features, where human visitation, use and impacts are strictly controlled and limited to ensure protection of the conservation values. Such protected areas can serve as indispensable reference areas for scientific research and monitoring.

Category Ib: Wilderness area

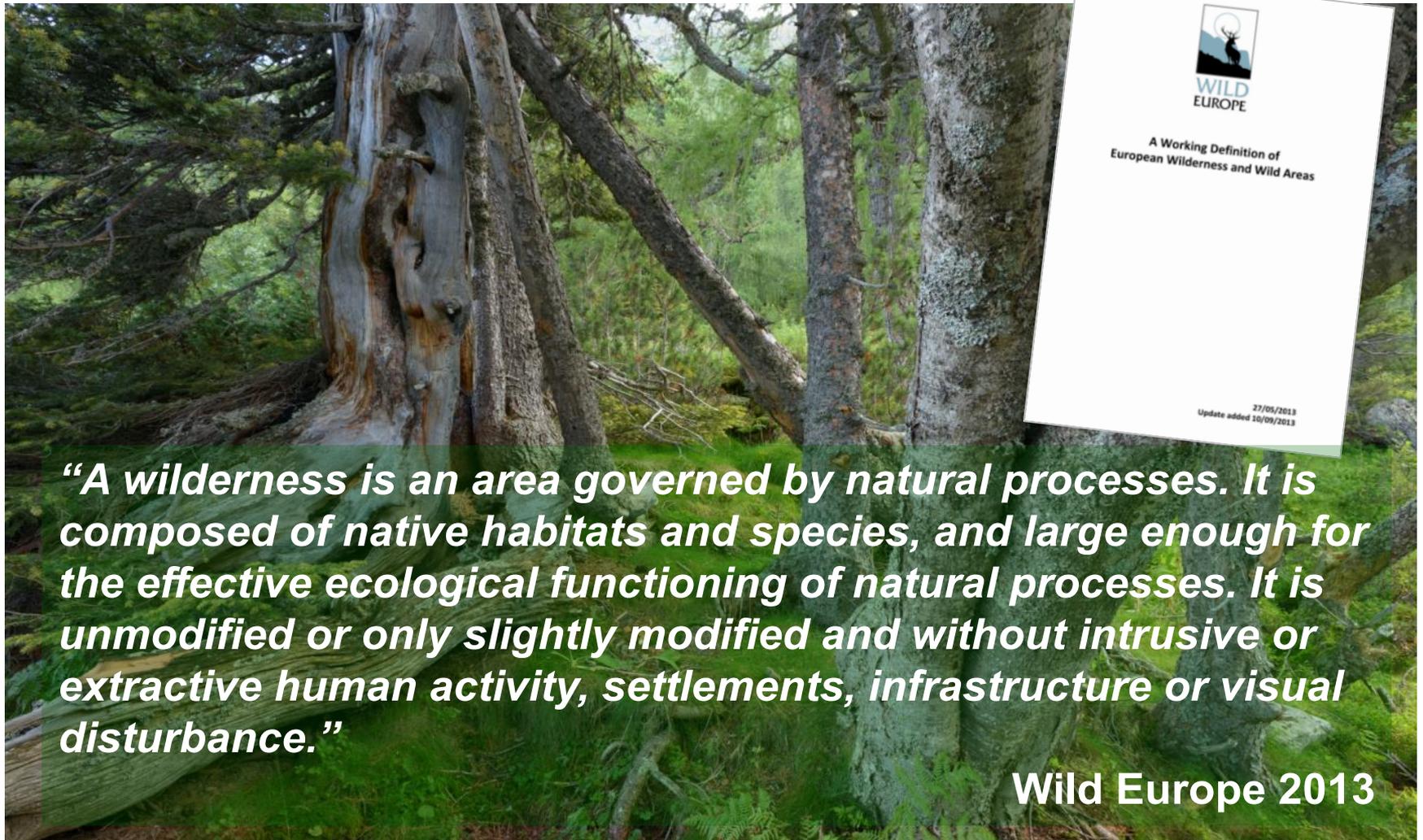
Category Ib protected areas are usually large unmodified or slightly modified areas, retaining their natural character and influence, without permanent or significant human habitation, which are protected and managed so as to preserve their natural condition.

In Wilderness area Dürrenstein, which was established between 1997 and 2001, **two IUCN categories apply: Ia Strict nature reserve**“ on 1.159 hectares and **Ib „Wilderness“**, on 2.289 hectares



Wilderness Definitions used in Austria

Increasingly relevant: Wild Europe Definitions and Criteria



“A wilderness is an area governed by natural processes. It is composed of native habitats and species, and large enough for the effective ecological functioning of natural processes. It is unmodified or only slightly modified and without intrusive or extractive human activity, settlements, infrastructure or visual disturbance.”

Wild Europe 2013



2

Past and Present of Wilderness Protection in Austria



Past and Present of Wilderness Protection in Austria

Nature Protection as Protection of Cultural Landscapes

As in most European countries, **Austrian nature conservation has its roots in the 19th century romantic movement** and its critique of the consequences of the Industrial Revolution, both at societal and landscape level.

Thus, the Austrian nature conservation movement was very much focussed on the **preservation of traditional cultural landscapes**, ideally the **agrarian/pastoral landscapes of the 19th century**, that have survived in many places until after World War II, and were lost later in the 20th century



For a very long time, **Wilderness Protection was not an issue** – also because **wilderness in the sense of completely virgin, untouched land** was considered as practically **non-existent**



Past and Present of Wilderness Protection in Austria

Wilderness Protection as a rare exception



1875 Primeval Forest Rothwald, Lower Austria



Past and Present of Wilderness Protection in Austria

Early impact of the American National Park Idea





Past and Present of Wilderness Protection in Austria

Early impact of the American National Park Idea



1909: Sarek National Park, Sweden



Past and Present of Wilderness Protection in Austria

Early impact of the American National Park Idea



1914: Swiss National Park, Val Cluozza



Past and Present of Wilderness Protection in Austria

Early impact of the American National Park Idea



Dr. August Prinzinger
(1844-1918)

Areas bought for a national park in the Hohe Tauern Region 1913 Stubachtal-
Felbertal 1928: Ober- und Untersulzbachtal



Past and Present of Wilderness Protection in Austria

Late 1940ies to 1970ies: bad times for wild nature





Past and Present of Wilderness Protection in Austria

1980ies: National Parks as alternatives to mega-projects



Almost all Austrian national Parks were proposed as “**soft**” alternatives to destructive mega-projects:

- **Hohe Tauern:** Mega dam and mega ski- resort(s)
- **Nockberge:** Mega ski resort
- **Donau Auen:** Hydropower plant
- **Kalkalpen:** Hydropower plants, military shooting range
- **Thayatal:** Hydropower plant





Past and Present of Wilderness Protection in Austria

1990ies: a wave of park establishment

With the backup of widespread public support, the 1990ies **saw a wave of national park establishment** in Austria

National Park	established in	total size (ha)	core size (ha)
Hohe Tauern - Carinthia	1981	44.000	32.700
Hohe Tauern - Salzburg	1984	80.500	57.000
Hohe Tauern Tyrol	1991	61.000	34.700
Neusiedler See-Seewinkel	1993	9.064	4.500
Donau-Auen	1996	9.341	6.432
Kalkalpen	1997	20.850	18.639
Thayatal	2000	1.330	1.260
Gesäuse	2002	11.306	9.676
Total		237.391	164.907



Parks were supposed to **protect the most spectacular Austrian landscapes efficiently and to support tourism and sustainable regional development**

Although strict nature protection was an agreed purpose of all parks, **process protection and wilderness qualities were not very much in focus at first**



Past and Present of Wilderness Protection in Austria

Wilderness first neglected, then gradually discovered

Instead, many Austrian parks were **busy with setting up the conservation management in their external zones**, where interactions with land-users were most intense

Accordingly, **communication focus was rather on issues of sustainable land use and the preservation of traditional land management methods**. Process protection and wilderness were hardly mentioned in many publications

In parallel, **active restoration work** was begun in core areas, but often with little attention for wilderness qualities





Past and Present of Wilderness Protection in Austria

Wilderness first neglected, then gradually discovered

Kalkalpen national park was the only park with a strong **emphasis on wilderness from the outset**. The park has used the term consistently and continuously in its philosophy, programmes and publications – this was a conscious decision after an initial analysis of the parks **“unique selling point”**

The other Austrian parks took up wilderness issues in earnest only after **National Parks Austria** was founded - the joint roof organisation of the parks, which cares for the **joint strategic orientation of the parks, joint policies and a coherent communication**





Past and Present of Wilderness Protection in Austria

Process Protection and Wilderness as strategic issues

In 2010, National Parks Austria published the **Austrian National Park Strategy**. It reminded the parks that “**the main goal of the parks core zones is the free development of ecosystems**”. The strategy also stressed that the proportion of areas with non-intervention management should not fall below 75%

What was unusual though, was that the strategy also called for the establishment of **wilderness zones** within the parks. As a first step, parks were encouraged to develop concepts for such zones

This was largely a reaction to the **outcomes of the “Prague Conference on Wilderness and Large Natural Habitats” in 2009**, which had been organized by the growing European Wilderness movement, under the Czech EU-presidency and with support of the EU Commission





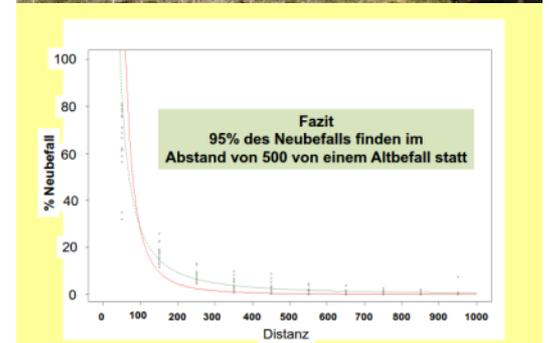
Past and Present of Wilderness Protection in Austria

Bark-beetles put Wilderness orientation to a test

Between 2002 and 2010 a series of heavy windstorms and warm summers have led to large **bark-beetle outbreaks in spruce-dominated mountain forests**. These outbreaks have affected the two national parks Kalkalpen and Gesäuse, as well as the Wilderness area Dürrenstein

The first reaction of the forestry authorities was a conventional one – **salvage logging was started in the two national parks**. This prompted intensive protests from NGOs and from the park administration in Kalkalpen, where salvage logging was soon stopped

In Gesäuse NP, salvage logging went on despite the protests. The **Wilderness area Dürrenstein** took a different approach, it commissioned **scientific research, aiming at the development of wilderness-friendly bark-beetle management concept**



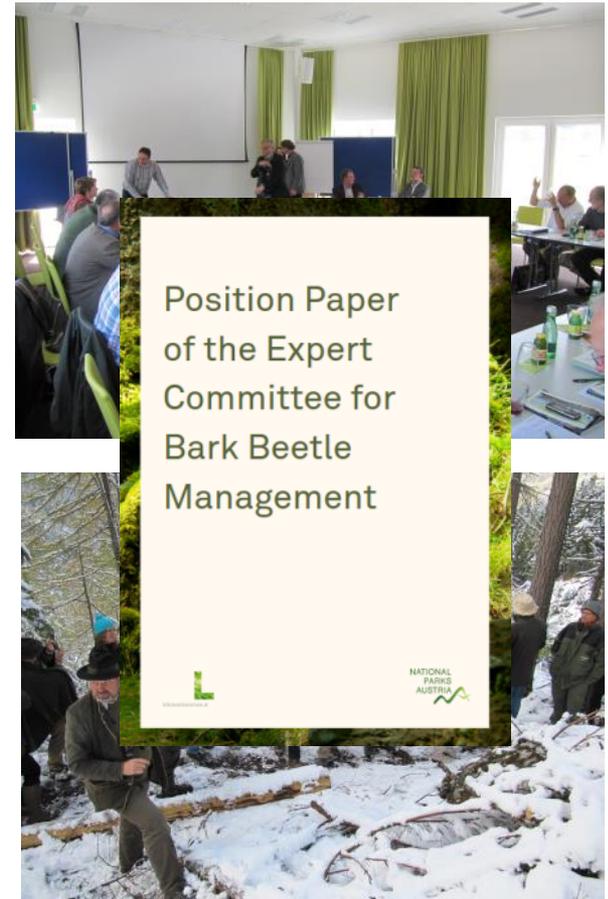


Past and Present of Wilderness Protection in Austria

Bark-beetles position paper as a milestone

The conflicts around salvage logging in NP Gesäuse prompted National Parks Austria in 2011 to plan a joint **position paper on bark-beetle management in Austrian National Parks**, which provides guidance to all parks administration on that contentious issue.

The paper was produced in a **participatory fashion**, within a **working group of the advisory board of National Parks Austria**. The working group consisted of representatives of federal and provincial authorities (conservation and forestry departments respectively), the Austrian state Forests, national park directors and several NGOs. It was supported by experts from universities and administrations. After a long series of **hearings, excursions, heated debates and many drafts**, the board came up with a final paper that had the support of all parties. It was endorsed in 2013. The paper soon helped to settle the Gesäuse-conflict





Past and Present of Wilderness Protection in Austria

Bark-beetles position paper as a milestone

The position paper states the following principles:

- Commitment to **process protection as key objective** in the core zones of national parks, wilderness areas, biosphere reserves and in national forest reserves
- Commitment to **comprehensive protection of adjacent commercial forests**
- Commitment to **safeguarding public interests in forests**
- Need for **education and awareness raising about dynamic natural processes**
- Need for constant **research and monitoring efforts**

The paper recommends:

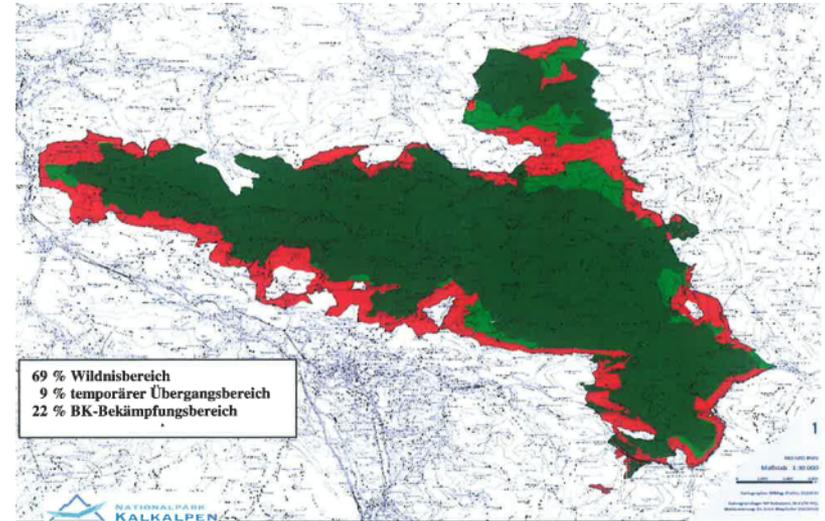
- Application of **§32a of the Austrian Forest Law** to all areas with process protection (exemption paragraph to the strict obligation for intervention in the case of bark-beetle outbreaks)
- **Zoning of protected areas: a large non-intervention core is surrounded by a 500m wide intervention strip**, where any outbreak is controlled immediately with non-chemical methods. **Rules are set out for the location, shape and management of the intervention strip**, as well as for exceptional shifts in the zoning pattern.
- **Communication, information, research and monitoring activities.**



Past and Present of Wilderness Protection in Austria

Bark-beetles position paper as a milestone

This is how the model looks in practice:
In NP Kalkalpen, **14.165 hectares (69%** of the parks total area) remain **free of any intervention against bark beetles** (green areas); **4.587 hectares are intervention zone** (red areas, strip often wider than 500 m); another 1.876 hectares (=9%) will be developed as future non-intervention zones (light green)



Wilderness area Dürrenstein has set up a similar system, but more sophisticated in its details. Here, **bark beetles are monitored closely inside and outside the area.** Depending on where an outbreak starts, the protected area and its neighbours take responsibility for the cost of control in turn, or they share them

The position paper and its Annex (with a description of the Dürrenstein model) can be downloaded from:

http://www.nationalparksaustria.at/fileadmin/pdf_s/NPA_News/Englisch_Bark_Beetle.pdf

http://www.nationalparksaustria.at/fileadmin/pdf_s/NPA_News/Englisch_Bark_Beetle_Annex.pdf



Past and Present of Wilderness Protection in Austria

Position paper on renewable energy development

The success with the bark beetle position paper inspired National Parks Austria to tackle another difficult issue by the same means:

The construction of **hydropower and windpower plants in the vicinity of national parks**

Again, a subgroup from the advisory board, supported by external experts like spatial and energy planners, developed **guidelines for the development of energy infrastructure** close to park borders. **Among others, this paper highlights the importance of landscape quality and wilderness atmosphere in and around the parks**

The paper was endorsed in 2014. It has not yet withstood any real practical test, but it **contributed to avert windpower plants close to NP Kalkalpen, NP Thayatal and a hydropower plant close to NP Hohe Tauern Tyrol**





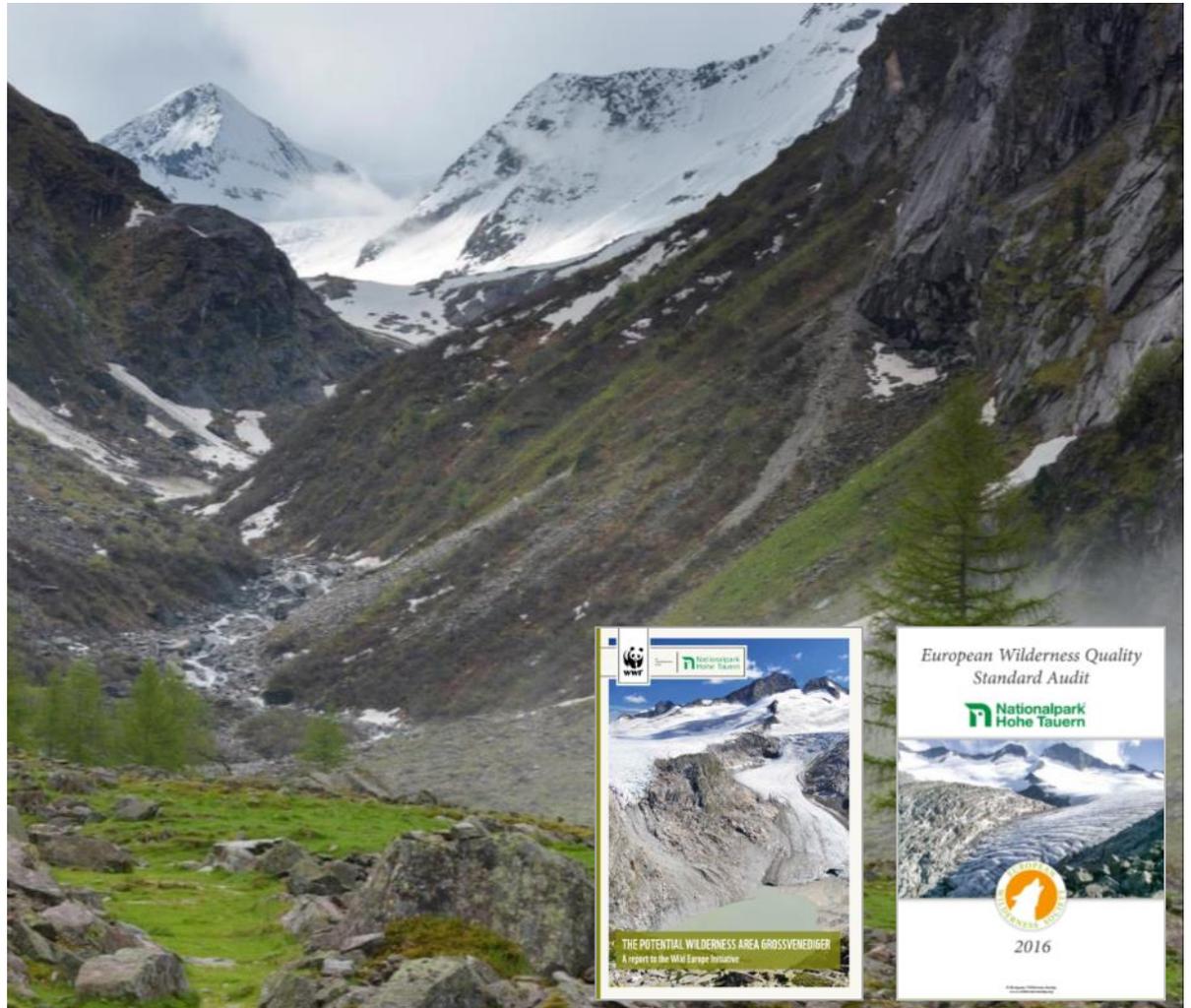
Past and Present of Wilderness Protection in Austria

Establishing explicit wilderness areas in national parks

In 2012, NP Hohe Tauern Salzburg heeded the call of the National Park Strategy 2010 and launched a process to **establish a 8.500 hectares wilderness area** within its confines

A feasibility study was prepared by WWF and the European Wilderness Society in 2014. In 2016 an audit was performed by EWS – both relying strongly on the **Wilderness Criteria of Wild Europe**

You will hear more on the process in Wolfgang Urban´s presentation





Past and Present of Wilderness Protection in Austria

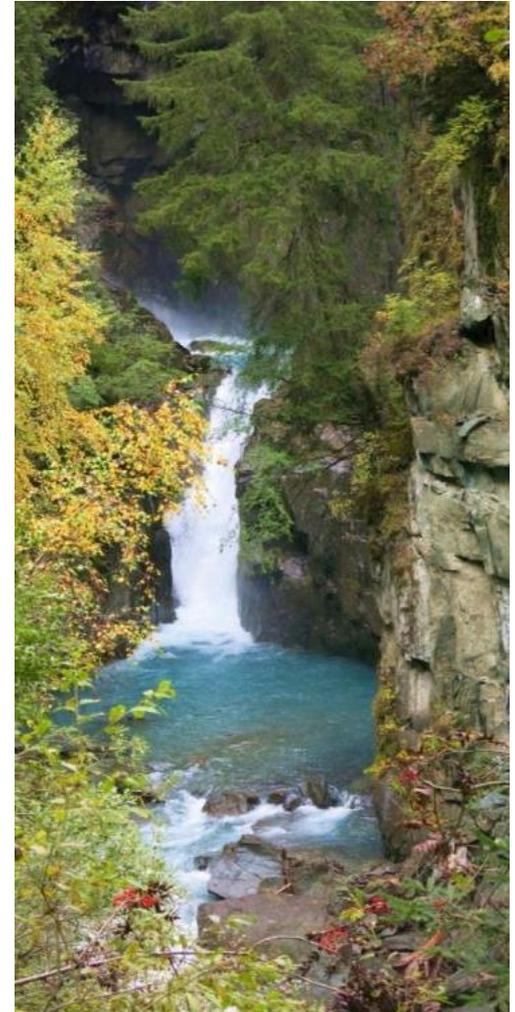
Establishing Wilderness areas in national parks

Experiences made and questions arising with respect to **wilderness implementation** – mainly in NP Kalkalpen and Hohe Tauern, but also elsewhere – **increasingly called for a standardized** approach within National Parks Austria

Also, the **revision of the national park strategy planned for 2016** required some **clarifications regarding process protection, wilderness and the relationships of different protected area categories**

Therefore, on an initiative of WWF, National Park Austria embarked on the production of a position paper on **“Wilderness and the Protection of Natural Processes in Austrian National Parks”** in January 2016

The paper has been finalised and endorsed on the **22nd of February 2017**. It is bound to be another milestone in Austrian wilderness policy





Past and Present of Wilderness Protection in Austria

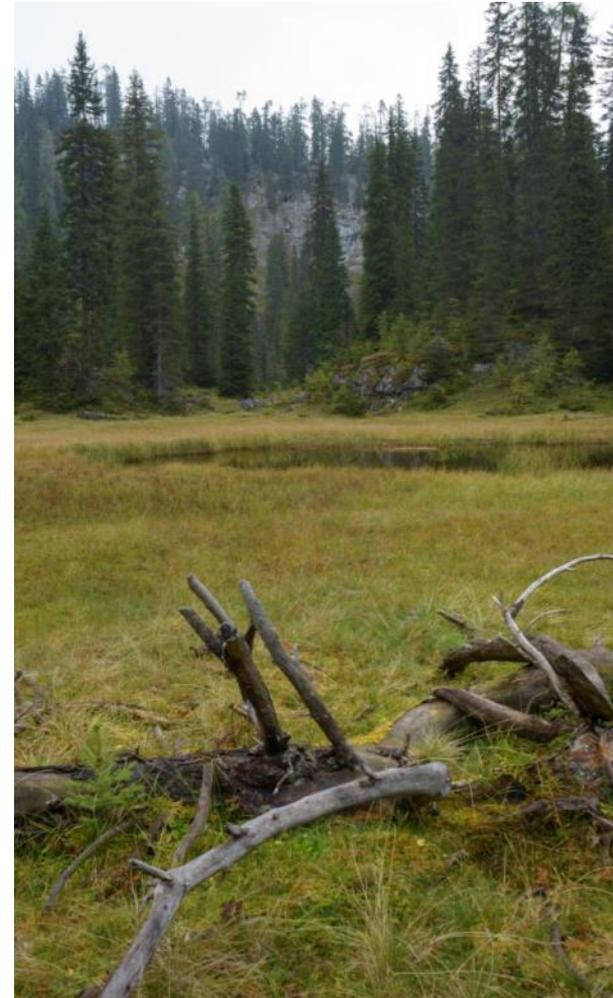
Position paper on Wilderness and Process Protection

The paper provides **guidance on wilderness and the protection of natural processes in Austrian national parks** and gives **recommendations for the implementation of wilderness** within the parks

It is intended for application to **Austrian national parks exclusively** (it is not intended as a guidance for wilderness areas outside the parks)

While all parks **must** focus on the protection of natural processes in their core zones, establishing wilderness zones on suitable portions of the parks is **not mandatory** and **shall not serve as a future evaluation criterion**

Still, the paper encourages parks to actively **consider, map, monitor, preserve and develop existing wilderness qualities** within their confines





Past and Present of Wilderness Protection in Austria

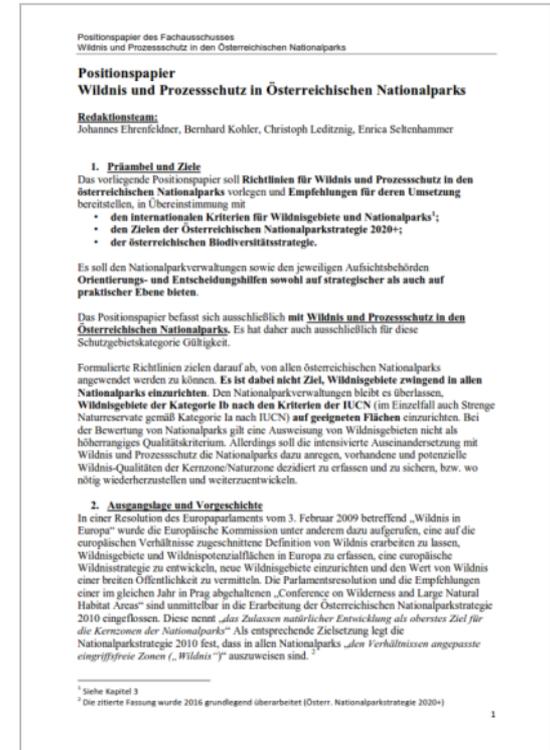
Position paper on Wilderness and Process Protection

Introductory chapters of the paper:

- Relations to existing legal framework (CBD, Alpine Convention, EU Birds- & Habitat-Directives, Austrian Forestry Law...)
- Definition of Natural Process Protection
- Definitions of Wilderness (IUCN Ib and Ia, Wild Europe Definition, Definition of the US Wilderness Act)
- Introduction to the Wilderness Continuum Concept
- Significance of Process Protection to National Parks and Wilderness Areas
- Wilderness and Natura 2000

Main chapter of the paper:

- 22 Criteria for the establishment of Wilderness areas within Austrian National Parks (based on the list of **Criteria in Wild Europe 2013 and the 2016 IUCN-Guidance on Category Ib areas**), with some additional criteria of special relevance to alpine areas
- Decision Guidelines for inevitable interventions



The German version of the paper will be available online soon, **an English version should become available by May 2017**



Past and Present of Wilderness Protection in Austria

Outreach campaign with wilderness focus

Currently, National Parks Austria is running an **outreach campaign** that focusses on wilderness themes, with motives from all 6 parks

„Nothing is more touching than the untouched“





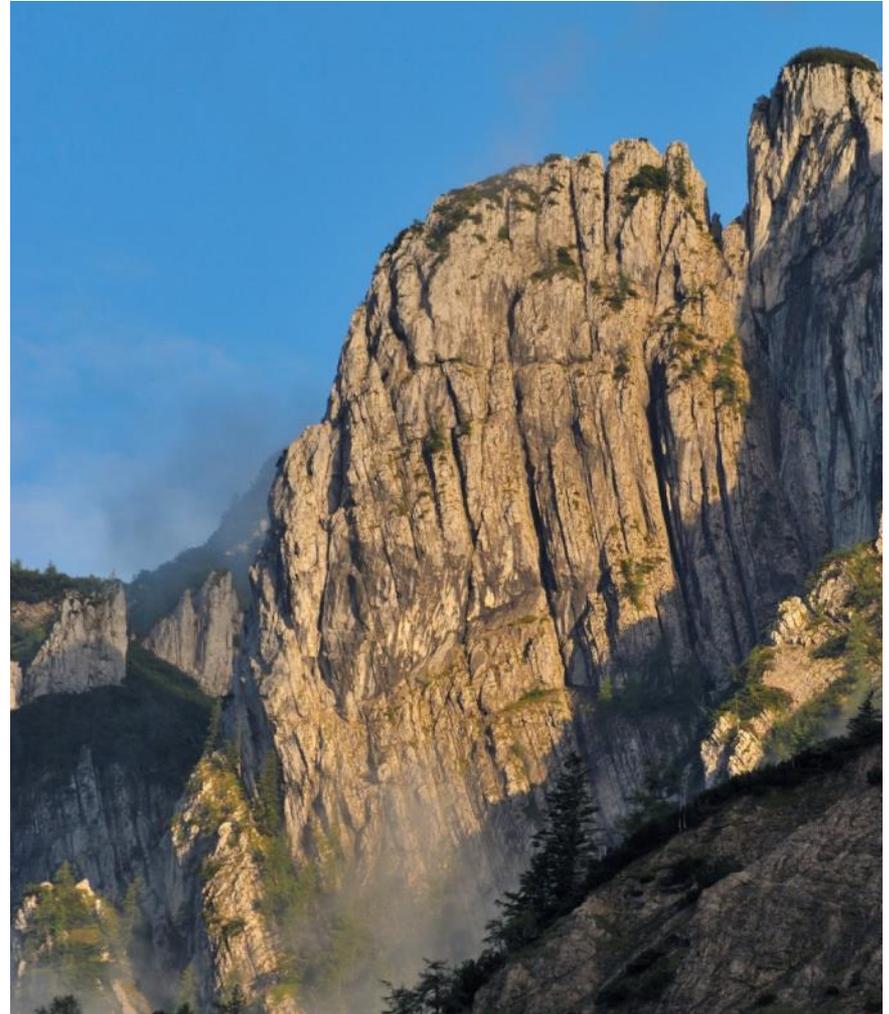
Past and Present of Wilderness Protection in Austria

Wilderness in the new national park strategy

Mention must also be made of the **new National Park Strategy**, which has been written in 2016 and is currently submitted for approval to the federal provinces

Under goal 1, the strategy stresses once more **the importance of unrestrained natural process in the core zones**. It also renews the former **emphasis on the 75% rule** and on the incompatibility of extractive human land use within the core zones

Additionally, it proposes that Austrian parks should seek to establish **IUCN Ib wilderness areas** on suitable tracts of land within their confines





Past and Present of Wilderness Protection in Austria

Wilderness actors beside of national parks

So the **National Parks** have definitely become an important player in the field of wilderness in Austria, but they are not the only actors on the scene

There is of course the **Wilderness Area Dürrenstein**, with its research and outreach programmes

There are the NGOs, especially **WWF**, who runs a wilderness programme since 2010

And – perhaps more surprisingly – there are the **Austrian Federal Forests**. Since 2011, the State Forests have a **cooperation** with WWF that focuses – among others – explicitly on wilderness



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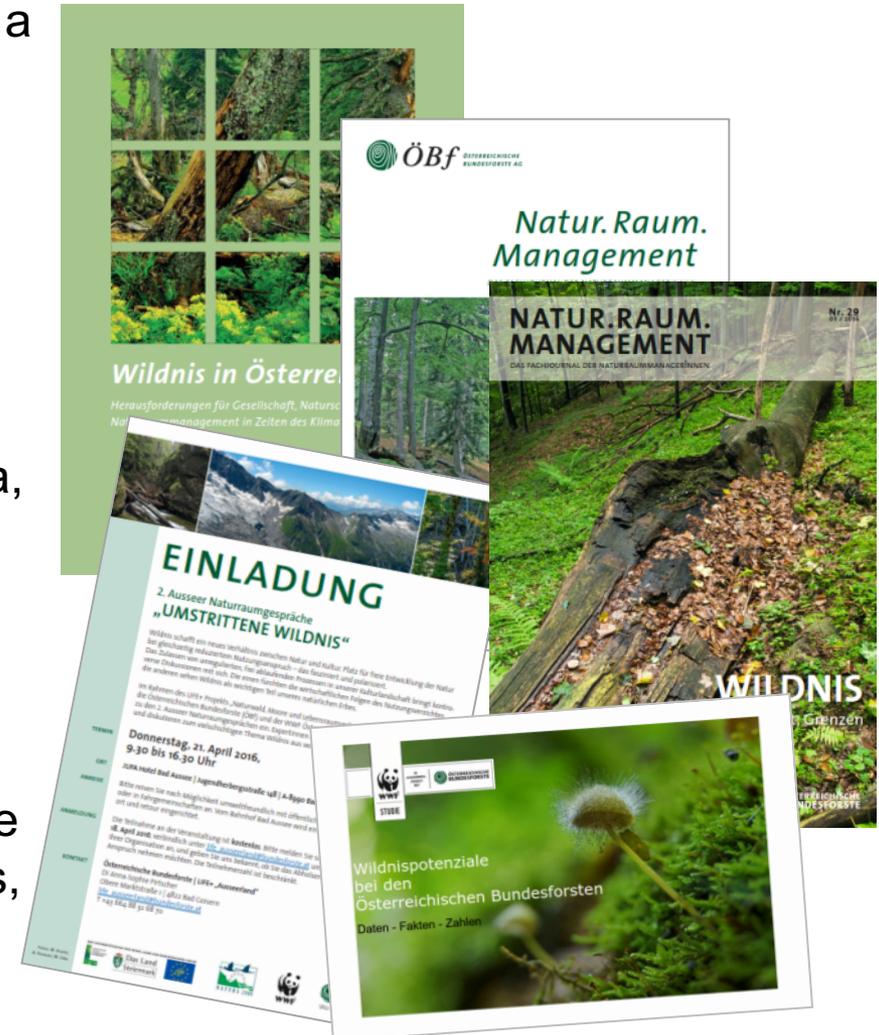
Past and Present of Wilderness Protection in Austria

Wilderness actors beside of national parks

One product of the cooperation has been a **the first study on wilderness** in Austria. Among others, that study explored opinions of experts and stakeholders on the opportunities of establishment of wilderness areas in Austria

Later on, the State Forest took up the wilderness issue repeatedly in their media, especially in **their own journal on conservation management**. In 2016, a **conference on wilderness** was held in Bad Aussee

Together with WWF, the State Forest have embarked on a series of internal analyses, exploring the **wilderness potential** on state property





Past and Present of Wilderness Protection in Austria

Wilderness actors beside of national parks

On a more practical level, the State Forests are **directly involved in wilderness management** in NP Kalkalpen, Donau Auen and in Hohe Tauern Salzburg, where they are a major landowners. In Kalkalpen and Donau Auen, the State Forests are part of the national park administration

In 2013, **wilderness area Dürrenstein has been enlarged by almost 1.000 hectares on land of the State Forests**. Here too, the State Forest became part of the administration

An most recently, the State Forest were involved in an attempt **to create a new, 3.000 hectares wilderness area in Styria**, adjacent to Dürrenstein. This process has come to a halt, because of disputes about compensation payments – but hopefully it will be resumed soon





Past and Present of Wilderness Protection in Austria

Wilderness actors beside of national parks

Finally, a few words about WWF Austria and Wilderness. Since 2010 we have intensified our engagement with wilderness. Currently we are focusing on 6 main strands of work:

- We are lobbying for the **establishment of wilderness as a conservation tool** in Austria
- We are **mapping the wilderness potential** of Austria
- We are trying to **inform and educate people about the value of wilderness**
- We are **supporting national parks in the enhancement of their wilderness qualities**
- We are lobbying for the **establishment of wilderness areas** outside national parks
- We are **fighting development projects** that threaten undeveloped areas and potential wilderness areas





Past and Present of Wilderness Protection in Austria

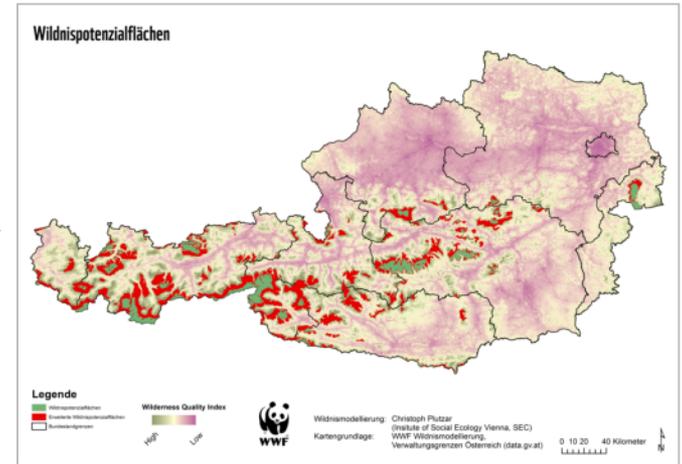
„Natural development takes place on 2% of the territory“

WWF's mapping of Austria's wilderness potential has shown that **between 2 and 8% of the Austrian territory would be suitable for the establishment of wilderness areas**, depending on the criteria for wilderness and landscape quality applied

Existing core zones of national parks and the single wilderness areas currently **cover 1,2%**

To reach the 2% goal of the Austrian Biodiversity Strategy would require the protection of another **0,8%**. This corresponds to almost **70.000** hectares

The average size of strict non-intervention core zones in Austria's national parks is **12.000 hectares**. Protecting **70.000 hectares** would amount to the establishment of **6 more parks!**



So a lot is happening in Austria, regarding wilderness and the protection of natural processes

But a lot more needs to be done!



Wildnis in Österreich – von der Erfassung zur Wildnisstrategie



Thank you for
your attention!