

# Living Landscapes

europa's  
NATURE  
REGIONAL  
LANDSCAPE PARKS

Europe's Nature, Regional, and Landscape Parks –  
model regions for the sustainable development of rural areas



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model regions for the sustainable development of rural areas

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# Preface

Dear Reader,

This book gives the first overview of Regional Nature Parks and their work in the Member States of the European Union, as well as Norway and Switzerland. There are almost 900 Nature, Regional, and Landscape Parks in 22 European countries. They cover around 8% of the total area of the EU-28, along with Norway and Switzerland. In this book, they are collectively referred to as ‘Regional Nature Parks’. What they have in common is that they play a forward-thinking role in combining the development of rural areas, the promotion of sustainable land use and nature-friendly tourism, and education for sustainable development with the protection of biological diversity. Regional Nature Parks are landscapes full of life, where people and nature are inextricably linked. They involve local people in their work, cooperate closely with local authorities, districts and cities and support achievement of sustainability objectives in each country. They are truly European, because they realize European objectives and funding programmes in their regions and make the European idea accessible to people.

The first part of the book shows what makes Regional Nature Parks special, how they benefit Europe and why they are the focus of this book. The second part goes into the distinctive features of Regional Nature Parks in the individual countries. Regional Nature Parks are represented by the umbrella organisation for Regional Nature Parks or the responsible ministry or authority, in each participating country.

This book was written within the ‘Europe’s Nature, Regional, and Landscape Parks’ project, undertaken by the Association of German Nature Parks (Verband Deutscher Naturparke, VDN) in cooperation with the Europarc Federation between October 2014 and July 2017. The project was supported by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (Bundesamt für Naturschutz) with funding from the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety

(Bundesministeriums für Umwelt, Naturschutz, Bau und Reaktorsicherheit). The book is the result of collaboration between many organisations and people that supported this project. They are the partners from the 22 countries involved in the project, hosts in eleven countries that welcomed the VDN on its travels and presented their Regional Nature Parks, as well as members of the task force accompanying the project, including Regional Nature Park representatives from seven countries. They are all named at the end of the book.

Regional Nature Parks are unique landscapes that make up the character and richness of their regions. However, they are also large scale protected areas, managed by a responsible administrative body. Regional Nature Parks are described here together for the first time as a group of protected areas in Europe. They already play an important role in integration of conservation and sustainable development of rural areas. They intend to further expand this role in years to come. We would like this book to contribute to further raising the profile of Regional Nature Parks and the work of their administrative bodies. This would help them to receive the necessary support in their countries and at European level, for the benefit of people and nature.



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## SWITZERLAND

# Regional Nature Parks

## Goals and Statutory Mandate

Regional Nature Parks in Switzerland are rural areas that are characterised by their diverse landscapes, rich biodiversity and unique cultural possessions. These regions set an example for sustainable development and generate surplus value for nature and the countryside, people and the economy. Switzerland currently has 14 Regional Nature Parks and one candidate for Nature Park status.

They have all emerged in just seven years - since 2008 - but there has been a series of failed projects, along with the successful ones. This exceptionally dynamic development has boosted sustainable, regional development in Switzerland. Nature Parks have three objectives: to preserve and enhance the status of natural values and the countryside, to strengthen the sustainable regional economy and to promote environmental education and awareness-raising about the special ecological, cultural, historical and economic features of the Parks.

For almost 100 years there was only one park in Switzerland - the Swiss National Park, also known as Parc Naziunal Svizzer, which was founded in 1914. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has designated it a Strict Nature Reserve (category 1a), so it meets the strictest international standards for protected areas. Creation of other parks only became possible when the Federal Act on the Protection of Nature and Cultural Heritage was revised in

### Facts and Figures

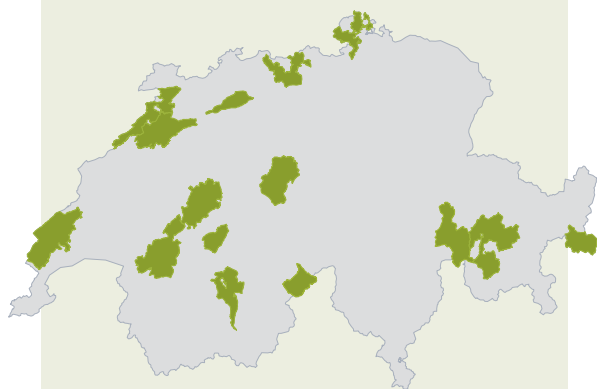
15 Regional Nature Parks (Regionale Naturpärke/parcs naturels régionaux/parchi naturali regionali)

Total surface area: 4,834 km<sup>2</sup>  
= 12 % of the national territory

Park sizes: Average of 322 km<sup>2</sup>  
(136 – 550 km<sup>2</sup>)

Oldest park: 2008. Most recent park: 2016.

Umbrella organisation: Swiss Parks Network (Netzwerk Schweizer Pärke/, Réseau des parcs suisses/ Rete dei parchi svizzeri), founded in 2007.



2007, stipulating conditions and processes for setting up Nature Parks. In addition to Nature Parks, the legislator created two further categories: National Parks in the new sense and Nature Experience Parks (Naturerlebnispärke), small parks near centres of population. The law closely follows the French model, where a charter that sets down the Park's objectives for ten years is the central strategic element for managing the Parks.

## Operation

True to Switzerland's tradition of democracy, impetus for a new Nature Park comes from local initiatives. A feasibility study tests whether the region is suitable for a Park. If it is, an association is set up to work out the strategy for the Park, step by step, during the development phase and to set it down in a charter. Once this is complete, the population of all affected communities vote on it. If they vote in favour of the Park and the charter is approved, the association submits an application for the 'Park' label to the Federal Office for the Environment (Bundesamt für Umwelt). The Federal Office for the Environment checks whether the natural and cultural values are of national importance and whether the charter corresponds to the prescribed criteria. If the decision is affirmative, the Park enters the operating phase and is labelled a 'Park of National Importance'. The charter is renewed every ten years and the communities agree on how it should continue. This grass-roots democracy approach to setting up and running Nature Parks is unique across the world.

Nature Parks promote regional cooperation in a unique way by bringing together communities with shared objectives that are formulated in the charter. One characteristic feature is collabora-

tion across all sectors. Nature Parks in Switzerland get representatives from tourism, agriculture, nature conservation and forestry round the table and develop solutions for the future with them, in a way that hardly any other institutions can.

## Financing

The Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN) finances up to 50% of the costs of Regional Nature Parks, under programme agreements. The remaining funds come from the cantons, local government and other sources. Nature Parks can also apply for project financing from other federal offices.

## Successful Projects

### Preserving and enhancing the status of nature, countryside and culture

With their cultivated areas and natural landscape, which amount to around 11.7% of the land area, Regional Nature Parks make up a considerable part of the network of valuable biotopes. They have an above-average wealth of endangered species and actively work to conserve them. Examples include creating new habitats for Midwife Toads (*Alytes obstetricans*) with volunteer assignments and helping various reptile species by building drystone walls. Forests and protected landscapes, such as moorland landscapes, are more common than average in the Parks. However, cultural landscapes are central to Regional Nature Parks. The Parks aim to preserve and foster them using an integrated approach that combines use and protection.

### Strengthening a sustainable economy

More than a third of the area of Regional Nature Parks is used for agricultural purposes and





organic farming is more common in the Parks than in the rest of Switzerland. Furthermore, sustainable agriculture and the traditional culinary heritage of the Regional Nature Parks is specifically encouraged with product certification. By producing regional products with the 'Swiss Parks' label, producers make a contribution to achieving the Park's objective, often in the sphere of ecology, but also in awareness-raising. The Parks help producers to market their products. There are now more than 1,000 certified products from eleven Regional Nature Parks.

As well as regional delicacies, Regional Nature Parks also offer unique experiences in and around their diverse cultural landscapes. The emphasis is on natural tourism. Visitors have access to a wide variety of hiking, cycling and e-bike routes, as well as interactive natural, cultural and educational offers. The environment is also used to bring employees of large firms closer to nature. Parks make a major contribution to added value for tourism.

Based on studies in the UNESCO Biosphere and Regional Nature Park Entlebuch and Val Müstair Biosphere, it is estimated that every franc of

public money invested generates six times the added value.

When it comes to tourism, Regional Nature Parks emphasise sustainable mobility, for example, by only advertising journeys by public transport and making sure that every tourist offer can be reached by public transport. Local transport links provided by Bus alpin and Alpentaxi help with this. It is thanks to these initiatives that Swiss Parks were 2016 finalist in the 'Tourism for Tomorrow Award', the international prize for sustainable tourism.

#### Awareness-raising and education

Parks are located in regions of high natural and cultural value, which makes them especially well-suited to teaching people about sustainable development. One of their key responsibilities is to develop relevant offers for residents, school classes and visitors, in order to raise people's awareness. All Parks have exhibitions, excursions, evenings of talks and discussion groups or entire project weeks, on a wide variety of topics, in their annual programme. Many of the offers are directly linked to the park's landscape, history and culture.

#### National and international cooperation

The lively and open exchange among the Regional Nature Parks and other Swiss parks was an important factor in the rapid development of Switzerland's park landscape. The Swiss Parks Network (Netzwerk Schweizer Pärke) played a key role in this. It is the umbrella organisation of all park categories in Switzerland and its responsibilities also include networking between the parks, as well as public relations.

By working together in a network, parks have boosted their negotiating power and been able

to set up important national cooperations with private firms (e.g. Raiffeisenbank, PostAuto or Coop). Finally, joint communication – including the campaign by the Federal Office for the Environment – makes the Parks more visible. According to a representative national survey, public awareness of Swiss parks rose from 3% in 2011 to 17% in 2015.

#### Outlook

The law of 2007 set in motion a wave of initiatives for creation of Parks. This set-up phase is now complete and the aim is now to establish the existing Parks. A crucial test will be renewal of the charter after ten years, on which the population of each Park will vote.

As part of the evaluation of the charter, the Parks have to produce proof of their effectiveness, which is a question of measurability, especially with regard to their economic performance. With regard to ecological performance, a pilot project is currently underway, in which all Regional Nature Parks define their objectives and future roles in preserving and supporting habitats (ecological infrastructure).

As they are model regions for sustainable development, Regional Nature Parks are increasingly being used to test out new energy concepts and regional economic cycles that are geared up to the challenges of the future (e.g. climate change, loss of natural habitat, etc.).

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