

New coordinator for research in Swiss parks

In 2007, the revised Federal Act on the Protection of Nature and Cultural Heritage created the regulatory basis for designating new nature parks. Today, Switzerland has four parks of national significance plus 16 further park projects that enjoy the support of the Federal Environment Office (Bundesamt für Umwelt, BAFU) in their application for a park label. There are three park categories, oriented on different needs and uses: National Parks, Regional Nature Parks and Nature Discovery Parks (see also Weissen, Parc Creation Boom in Switzerland, *eco.mont* Vol. 1/2). Establishing parks of national significance serves to protect and enhance exceptional habitats and particularly beautiful landscapes. At the same time, it should provide an impulse for tourism and sustainable regional development and encourage the population to experience nature.

Their special status makes the parks of national significance particularly relevant as reference and preference areas for comparative research on thematic fields of national interest with international links. Such research needs to be coordinated, if comparable results are to be achieved and duplicate efforts avoided. At the request of the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences, the BAFU established the post of coordinator of research in parks and protected areas. It is a 40% post, 30% funded by the BAFU and 10% by the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences. The coordinator of research in Swiss parks aims to support the parks of national significance and other protected areas, such as world heritage sites, in terms of research and to assist in their cooperation on wider themes.

Main tasks of this post, which is currently set to run until the end of 2011, include

- establishing a generally accessible information and exchange platform on research in parks. This is a regularly updated project database of ongoing and completed research projects on parks and protected areas in Switzerland. This project database will show which researchers and research institutes are working on which themes in Swiss parks and protected areas. Results of these research projects, insofar as they exist as public deliverables, will be integrated into the database and made available to anyone interested. This database is also linked into the database of protected alpine areas (<http://www.alparc.org/unsere-aktionen/forschung-plattform/european-mountain-pool>);
- developing a catalogue of national themes for research on parks and protected areas. This thematic catalogue is to form the basis for setting up a national programme "Parks research Switzerland" for carrying out multi-park research projects;
- supporting the BAFU in designing and setting up a monitoring system on parks and protected areas in Switzerland. This should enable the application of a joint basic methodology and ensure comparability of data and results. Eventually, it will provide basic data for performance reviews and result checks.

The coordinator can count on substantive and strategic support from a group of scientists from a variety of disciplines, who work in different Swiss research institutions. The support group also includes representatives of the BAFU, the Swiss Parks Network (<http://www.netzwerk-parke.ch/en/index.php>) and the Conference of Delegates for the Protection of Nature and Landscape (<http://www.kbnl.ch/de/0000.asp>).

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