



PILOT ACTION AREA	Sölktäler Nature Park, Austria
REASONS FOR STARTING PILOT ACTION	<p>Tourism is growing enormously in the region, with new hiking paths opened constantly, often ignoring wildlife habitats and interests of local inhabitants. In order to mitigate impacts and to protect nature in the best possible ways, it is important to know tourist flows and to raise awareness about special habitats in the area (alpine pastures) and impacts of tourist visits to nature.</p>
OBJECTIVES	<p>Mitigation of visitors' impacts on nature is done through 1) tourist flow management, 2) raising awareness of local inhabitants about biodiversity and ecotourism, and 3) maintaining alpine pastures.</p> <p>Alpine pastures are the flagship and tourist attraction of the region and are therefore an economic factor. It is important to have them in good and well-maintained condition.</p>
MONITORING TOOLS USED	<p>To understand tourist flows in the Park, electronic counters were installed at four main hiking trails, manual counting at two hiking spots in summer 2018 was conducted, and signatures of tourists in summit books were counted.</p> <p>Nature Park employees and external experts also counted indirect proofs of the presence of wild animals based on their tracks, feathers, and droppings, so the impact of touristic activities may be evaluated.</p>
MEASURES AND ACTIVITIES	<p>Electronic counters were installed at the entrances to diverse valleys. Data is organized in .xls files, which allows both the timely processing and graphic representation. Collected statistics allow 1) identification of days and weeks of increased tourist pressure, 2) annual comparison of tourist flows and 3) comparison between the presences found in four bigger valleys of the Park.</p> <p>An information brochure was created to communicate alternative winter ski itineraries within the Park and specific information about the local habitats and, consequently, to minimize the impact on wildlife.</p> <p>Redirection of skiers' flows to a less fragile habitat areas in the Park is done by 1) recommendation of ski tours to be used, 2) recommendation which ski paths not to be used, to decrease impact on wildlife in fragile areas, and 3) legally closing some feeding stations of red deer by landowners.</p> <p>Swarovski telescope (Spektiv) is used to monitor the impact of human presence on the local fauna. It aims at remotely observing the presence of specific animal species (chamois and grouse species) in areas historically characterized by a strong presence of hikers. Monitoring, evaluation of data and necessary adaptations will be done through the years.</p>
USE OF ACQUIRED DATA	<p>Obtained data and statistics are used to create better visitor management measures (for example ski tours booklet). The next five years' strategy will pursue a qualitative increase in tourism, which leads to the intensification of collaboration with local stakeholders, conservation of biodiversity, and planning of tourist flows. Visitor management will include defining zones for tourist purposes and undisturbed habitats of wildlife for summer tourism (besides those</p>



	<p>existing for winter tourism) in collaboration with local stakeholders. The first measure is issuing a booklet about hiking tours and alpine huts.</p>
<p>CONCLUSION</p>	<p>The current challenge is a low interest of the local population in implemented measures. It is seen that the acceptance of implemented measures increases if constant information is provided and if locals are made interested in the subject. Tourist management is quite easier because tourists accept easier information from booklets (like the one about ski routes).</p> <p>The survey confirmed the assumption of popular hiking trails in the Park (from “very frequented” to “moderate” for the Sölktäler Nature Park). It is worth noticing that Sölktäler’s “very frequented areas” are much less in comparison to other regions in Schladming Dachstein Regional Association, so the qualitative visitor management might be easier installed in Sölktäler Nature Park than in already overcrowded areas.</p>