



Factsheet

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Status of ecosystems in Switzerland

Switzerland's Fourth National Report under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity takes stock of the state of the 5 ecosystems occurring in the country and their development trends over the coming years.

Agricultural areas: Compensation areas lack quality

11.4 per cent of the agriculturally utilisable area has been set aside as ecological compensation areas. This has contributed significantly to halting habitat degradation. However, the quality of these compensation areas is unsatisfactory in the lowlands: for instance, 72 per cent of extensively farmed grasslands fall short of the quality targets prescribed by the Swiss Ecological Quality Ordinance. Overall, results are still poor. Progress has indeed been made in certain fields, however, notably by defining environmental targets for the agricultural sector.

Forests: More cover, but less diversity

Conserving and promoting biodiversity is already a goal of Swiss forest policy. 3.2 per cent of the forested area consists of declared forest reserves, and a further 18 per cent has been free of human intervention for around 50 years. On the other hand, under-exploited forests are less diverse in species and species associations than managed forests. Furthermore, pressure on the forest ecosystem is mounting continuously: on a fine day, up to 240 000 people visit a forest.

Rivers and lakes: Returning watercourses to a natural state

54 per cent of Switzerland's watercourses are considered to be in a natural or near-natural state. In the densely populated alpine valleys, in contrast, almost half (46%) of rivers and streams are in a state classified as insufficient. The situation is similar on the Central Plateau (38%) and in the Jura (36% of watercourses insufficient). The measures designed to return water bodies to a natural state adopted in late 2009 by the Swiss parliament can be expected to improve the situation. Inputs of pollutants – notably phosphorus – to lakes have been reduced. The successes achieved may be compromised, however, by the presence of micropollutants in waters, the rise in water temperatures caused by climatic changes and the spread of invasive species.

Dry lands: Almost 3000 sites protected

Switzerland recently established an inventory of dry meadows and pastures of national importance. Using this instrument, it should be possible to ensure the conservation of the last remaining managed areas of this kind in Switzerland (just under 3000 sites, making up 1% of the national territory).

Mountain areas

The mountain areas have largely preserved their diversity despite economic and touristic development. The species richness of meadows and pastures as well as forests in intermediate altitudinal zones is far greater than that of similar habitats in the lowlands. Switzerland has a special responsibility for the Alps as a biodiversity hotspot. At high altitudes, some species have a limited capacity for dispersal, putting them at a greater risk of extinction.