

ACTIVITY REPORT OF THE
Soil Protection Working Group
FOR THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE XV AND XVI MEETINGS OF
THE ALPINE CONFERENCE (April 2019 – December 2020)

1. Overview of the mandate or relevant decision of the Alpine Conference

Summary of the main tasks according to the 2019-2020 mandate (for Working Groups) or decision ACXV/A6 of the XV Alpine Conference (for Boards)

The activities foreseen for the Soil Protection Working Group in its first mandate period:

1. Foster exchange and awareness-raising concerning soil protection also by close cooperation with existing networks on soil protection with focus on Alpine soils and especially on vulnerable soils like wetlands and peatlands.
2. Facilitate the implementation of Articles 20 (establishment of harmonized databases) and 21 (establishment of permanent monitoring areas and coordination of environmental monitoring) of the Soil Conservation Protocol.
3. Address the interlinkages between qualitative and quantitative aspects of soil protection.
4. Report on challenges and solutions towards a more economical and prudent use of soils in the Alps.
5. Support of the Alpine Soil Partnership (Network for Soil Protection).

The Soil Protection Working Group was chaired by Germany.

2. Meetings

Summary of the meetings (date, place, main topics and outcomes)

The Soil Protection Working Group met five times during the mandate period. In these meetings, all topics foreseen by the mandate were tackled.

- 1st meeting: 18 – 19 June 2019, Munich (Germany). The focus topic was the definition of the work plan: Alpine Soil Partnership; start of a stock-taking of current soil relevant networks and projects; option of collecting soil awareness raising activities in the perimeter of the AC; idea of Alpine Soil Film Tour; soil functions assessment; first

exchange on permanent soil monitoring areas; collection of important topics, which should be address regarding interlinkages between qualitative and quantitative aspects of soil protection.

- 2nd meeting: 16 – 17 October 2019, Innsbruck (Austria). Topics: Exchange with PLANALP and the Youth Parliament to the Alpine Convention (YPAC); workshop with ACB for developing soil implementation pathways; overview of institutions, partnerships, networks and projects; development of Alpine Soil Film Tour concept; defining process for developing the report on economical and prudent use of soils in the Alps; second exchange on permanent soil monitoring areas based on submitted questionnaires; discussion on difficulties regarding soil data harmonization; first exchange on agriculturally used moorlands. The meeting took place back-to-back to the final conference of the Links4Soils project and the Austrian Soil Forum including a joint lunch to foster exchange between the Group and actors like the Alpine Soil Partnership.
- 3rd meeting: 22 April 2020, virtual (originally planned for Bolzano/ Bozen (Italy)). Topics: update on Alpine Soil Partnership; presentation of Links4Soils results of the survey on the implementation status of the Soil Conservation Protocol of the Alpine Convention; update on Alpine Soil Film Tour; update on process to develop the report on economical and prudent use of soils in the Alps with focus on data availability; brief exchange on permanent soil monitoring areas based on submitted 1st and 2nd questionnaires; discussion that LUCAS Soil should play a significant role regarding a harmonized database in the Alps and presentation of former Interreg Alpine Space Project “Monitoring Network in the Alpine Region for Persistent and other Organic Pollutants”; outcomes of workshop on European peatland strategies and current work on peatlands of the project Impuls4Action; definition of proposals of concrete priority measures for the French Presidency.
- 4th meeting: 21 - 22 July 2020, virtual. Topics: update on the Alpine Soil Partnership; concluding the stock-taking of institutions, projects and networks; soil function maps for soil awareness raising; update on Alpine Soil Film Tour; exchange on first draft version of the report “economical and prudent use of soil in the Alps”; discussion on stock-taking of permanent soil monitoring areas; exchange with JRC on LUCAS Soil and the issue of harmonizing and availability of national/regional soil data; exchange on soil excavation material; strategies on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) regarding soil; peatlands in the Alps; future mandate.

- 5th meeting: 07 October 2020, virtual. Topics: update on Alpine Soil Partnership; update on new work program of EUSALP AG 6; update on planned mandate for a Working Group on Spatial Planning of the Alpine Convention; update Alpine Soil Film Tour; finalizing report on economical and prudent use of soil in the Alps; finalizing stock-taking of permanent soil monitoring areas; presentation of LUCASSA and further exchange on LUCAS Soil; exchange on agriculturally used peatlands.

3. Activities carried out

Synthetic report on activities carried out (including outreach and communication activities)

- Establishment of the Soil Protection Working Group (composed of representatives of the Alpine States and observers).
- **Exchanges** with PLANALP, members of the YPAC and a workshop on developing implementation pathways for reaching the Alpine Climate Target System 2050 in the field of soil protection took place during the 2nd meeting. Furthermore the 2nd meeting was organized back-to-back to the Alpine Soil Forum to foster exchange with Links4Soils, the Alpine Soil Partnership and the Austrian Soil Forum. Further exchanges took place regarding a workshop on European peatland strategies, with Impuls4Action, with the office LAND-PLAN, EUSALP AG 6 and a spatial planning expert regarding a possible future spatial planning working group of the Alpine Convention. With focus on soil data harmonization and soil monitoring sites an active cooperation with the Joint Research Center of the European Commission (JRC) was started. Furthermore, information about relevant meetings and conferences in connection to soil topics in the Alps (e.g. EUSALP AG 6 final conference, ELSA annual conference, Eurosoil conference) were shared during meetings and as written information. A stock-taking of institutions, projects and networks, with whom it is relevant to exchange regarding soil protection and in the Alps was done.
- The concept of an Alpine Soil Film Tour consisting of movie screening events with accompanying program by e.g. soil scientists of movie authors in the Alpine States was developed in order to reach a broader and younger target group with those soil **awareness-raising** events. Three movies, which had won the award "Best film on the topic of soil" between 2015 and 2019 at the Innsbruck Nature Film Festival, had been chosen and the five film clips on soil in the Alps developed in scope of Links4Soils were added to this list. After a promising start of planning Alpine Soil Film Tour event options in most Alpine States the COVID-19 pandemic limited the activities significantly. Gladly

Alpine Soil Film Tour events might still take place in Innsbruck (Austria) in autumn and in December in Mojstrana (Slovenia) as well as virtually in Berlin (Germany). Furthermore, the importance of soil function maps for awareness raising and to enable well informed decision making was addressed.

- Regarding the **facilitation of the implementation of Articles 20 (establishment of harmonized databases) and 21 (establishment of permanent monitoring areas and coordination of environmental monitoring) of the Soil Conservation Protocol** a stock-taking of soil monitoring mechanisms and areas was undertaken by collecting them by a first questionnaire. On that basis, international monitoring mechanisms, which generate comparable soil data and comprise sites in the Alpine region, were identified and collected by a second questionnaire. The results were analyzed and summarized. Since also on the EU level the harmonization of national or regional soil data was not possible due to differing systems and data gaps, the LUCAS Soil survey coordinated by EUROSTAT and implemented by the JRC, was introduced. Thus, the Alpine EU Member States and in the survey 2015 also Switzerland were covered by the LUCAS Soil survey and should be considered regarding this topic. An active cooperation with the JRC on that topic was started at the 4th meeting of the Working Group.
- Regarding the **interlinkages between qualitative and quantitative aspects of soil protection** some topics were chosen to exchange on, such as soil function assessment, excavation material, peatlands, strategies on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) regarding soil.
- Exchange on agriculturally used **peatlands** took place during the 2nd and 5th meeting. Furthermore, in the 3rd and 4th meeting a peatland focus was implied by respectively presentations and discussions of the European peatland strategy workshop outcomes and its implications for the Alpine area, the intermediate results of the Impuls4Action work package on peatlands, the Bavarian Masterplan Peatlands and the Swiss peatland strategy. Lastly also a chapter on wetland, peatland and moor areas was included in the report on economical and prudent use of soils.
- The **report on challenges and solutions towards a more economical and prudent use of soils in the Alps** was jointly developed by the Working Group. As a first step questions were proposed by the members, around which a structure for the report was developed. In the next step the questions were answered by the members and based on those answers and including 3 additional sources the report was drafted and finalized.
- The **Alpine Soil Partnership** (AlpSP, Network for Soil Protection) was discussed at every meeting of the Group. The Group underlined the importance to support the AlpSP

preferably by finding a permanent solution and defined this as a concrete priority measure proposed to the French Presidency of the Alpine Convention. The matter was presented to the 68th and to the 69th meeting of the Permanent Committee. The Chair of the Working Group succeeded to establishing a solution to support a staff member at the Climate Alliance Tyrol as coordination unit for the AlpSP for about 2 years, with financial support of Austria, Germany and Switzerland.

4. Results and outputs

Description of main results and outputs achieved

- **Exchange** fostered with PLANALP, YPAC, ACB, Links4Soils, AlpSP, JRC, office LAND-PLAN, EUSALP AG 6, Impuls4Action, ELSA. Stock-taking of institutions, projects and networks relevant for soil protection in the Alps.
- **Awareness-raising** concept “Alpine Soil Film Tour” developed for broad and young target group and probably first three Alpine Soil Film Tour events in Austria, Germany and Slovenia.
- Steps for **facilitation the implementation of Articles 20 (establishment of harmonized databases) and 21 (establishment of permanent monitoring areas and coordination of environmental monitoring) of the Soil Conservation Protocol** done by stock-taking of soil monitoring areas in the perimeter of the Alpine Convention, discussions on data harmonization and establishment of a cooperation with the JRC regarding the LUCAS Soil survey.
- Selected **interlinkages between qualitative and quantitative aspects of soil protection have been addressed** during the meetings.
- Exchange and networking on **wetlands and peatlands** fostered at 4 meetings and probably a project on capacity building, knowledge exchange and networking on peatlands in the Alps developed and starting soon by Germany with partners from the Alps.
- The **report on challenges and solutions towards a more economical and prudent use of soils in the Alps** was elaborated.
- Active work has been done to **support the Alpine Soil Partnership**.

5. Cooperation

Description of cooperation initiatives and activities with other Alpine Convention Thematic Working Bodies and other relevant bodies and processes (e.g. EUSALP)

- See 3.: activities carried out on exchange, and the attachment “Stock-taking of institutions, projects and networks relevant for soil protection in the Alps”

6. Attachments

List of the documents attached to this report, such as papers proposed for approval by the XVI Alpine Conference (thematic reports, guidelines, statements etc.) and supporting documents (workshop proceedings, survey reports etc.).

- *Report “Economical and prudent use of soil in the Alps”*
- *Stock-taking summary of permanent soil monitoring areas in the perimeter of the Alpine Convention (draft version)*
- *Cooperation with the JRC regarding the Soil Conservation Protocol Articles 20 and 21: Harmonized Databases and Soil Monitoring*
- *Stock taking of institutions, projects and networks relevant for soil protection in the Alps*