



BIOSA network of land owners for nature conservation in Austria

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In Austria contractual nature conservation are widely used for conservation purposes. Programmes for contractual nature conservation exist in all federal provinces and on the national level. BIOSA (Biosphere Austria) is a voluntary association of land owners who have agreed to dedicate a selected area of their lands either for cultural landscape research, scientific projects or the development of a new form of dynamic conservation¹.

Conservation areas were voluntarily contracted to BIOSA, and biotope management concepts conceived with the cooperation of owners and scientists, to ensure the diversity and set new impulses for a dynamic understanding of ecology. In the last ten years, these areas have grown into a network of over 3000 hectares of valuable biotopes with regular new additions.

Mission

In December 1994 a group of landowners founded BIOSA in Graz and decided on the following mission:

- Be involved in education and arousal of public awareness
- Implement a new form of conservation
- Organise and coordinate scientific projects
- Structure the integration of landowners in dynamic ecology
- Active contribution to the protection of biological diversity

There are many concepts for protecting nature - but only BIOSA has the voluntarily donated areas to transform these ideas into actions.

Targets

BIOSA has the following targets:

- Become an instrument in developing a practical form of conservation
- Inspire landowners to work ecologically
- Overcome ecological conflicts by forming new partnerships
- Seek new sponsors and members to support our projects
- Acceptance of biotope management and biodiversity in forestry and agriculture

Contract conservation

The basic idea of voluntary contract ecology is that owners, who have shown their great responsibility in the management of their estates, are reliable partners for ecological projects. BIOSA is also involved in educational, public information and eco-sponsoring projects.

Many landowners consider contract ecology a preferable alternative to governmentally enforced ecology. The owners can protect valuable biotopes through the ecological platform of BIOSA voluntarily and in many cases with remuneration.

Streams, lakes and ponds, moors, wet-lands, dry pastures, hedgerows, alpine grazing, woodlands, caves, forest verges and orchards are just some of the biotopes offered to BIOSA. Together with the owner and scientists, BIOSA develops an individual project for each biotope. This can be either an eco-management project or one involving scientific research. Following this a contract is drawn up, in which the

¹ <http://www.biosa.at/>

involvement and activities of the owner in the project are defined. BIOSA cares for 3000 hectares of contracted conservation areas.

Styrian Natural Forest Cells - Contract Conservation in Styria

The first models of contract conservation were established in Styria. In 1996 a contract was drawn up between the Styrian government, BIOSA and 7 landowners. The landowners had dedicated 84.15 hectares of forest, to be used as a model in biotope management and dynamic conservation.

It was expected that this would have a positive effect on the fauna and flora, permit eco-systematic research and conclusions as to the effects of low impact forestry. BIOSA now has 18 Natural Forest Cells with a total surface of 408 hectares. This network of cells is to be further extended. To this purpose, BIOSA and the government officials are constantly inspecting new biotopes, for which BIOSA then effects an evaluation and draws up the management plans.

Pilot and Research Projects

"Management in Natura 2000 areas"

In the last few years BIOSA has been intensively involved in Natura2000. During this pilot project many information meetings were held and the first solutions worked out between BIOSA and the landowners as to the best way for them to individually trans-position the EC directives.

Jubilee Fund Project "Kohltrattenmoor"

This high altitude moor was formed over 10.000 years ago, and is held to be the prime indicator of vegetation and climatic changes in the region. Thanks to the financial support through the National Bank Jubilee Fund, two research projects revealed the changes in climate and vegetation of the area since the last ice age.

Technical forest charts

The technical forest charts are instruments to be used voluntarily; they are a means of avoiding conflicting interests. In order to create a simple, practical and flexible planning element for forestry; a framework was developed. This framework can be adapted to any theme, and a supplement allows detailed planning.

BIOSA developed the first technical charts with the project partners on the following themes: "Forest and Water", "Forest and Game", "Cultural achievement of a private forestry estate", "Forest and Tourism", "The forest needs small holders", "Forest and Natura 2000".