

## **Value based decision making process for strategic visitor management in the Natura 2000 area Lech River Valley, Tyrol**

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The Lech valley with the river Lech and its tributaries is one of the last natural alpine river valleys in Austria. The ecological and scientific significance of the Natura 2000 area with its extensive dynamic braided river stretches lies in its high biodiversity and the occurrence of numerous internationally endangered species.

Apart from that the area contains a high number of recreational and educational values as well. The area is renowned for its biking and hiking trails and its unique water sport opportunities. Nevertheless, most intense impact occurs from the daily use of the local population in the densely populated Lech valley area nearby.

Due to its long and narrow shape the protected area is very vulnerable to impacts and therefore, to avoid negative impacts on natural values from recreational use, not only a management plan, but also a visitor strategy has been developed as part of an extensive European Union LIFE funded project.

The decision making process for the establishment of the visitor management concept was based on a GIS supported risk analysis: First current ecological and recreational values have been located and assessed. Subsequently hotspots have been defined in areas, where those contrasting values overlay. These hotspots were defined in areas of high ecological vulnerability and high visitor impact from intense recreational use.

This hotspot analysis served as a basis for discussion and co-operation with the local population and stakeholders to agree on management solutions.

As a result specific management actions were defined and the allocation of visitor infrastructure was planned accordingly. As a response to the need for more detailed information about recreational uses and users a visitor monitoring concept was included in the visitor strategy as well.

This paper describes practical planning policies to highlight the need for strategic planning of recreational use in protected area management based on the comprehensible evaluation of the hazard potential from uses and the vulnerability of ecological values.