

**MANDATE OF THE
Soil Protection Working Group
FOR THE PERIOD 2025-2026
(BETWEEN THE XVIII AND XIX MEETINGS OF THE ALPINE
CONFERENCE)**

1. Introductory remarks

Importance of the issues selected and relevance of the proposed way to tackle them, including reference to the Alpine Convention and its Protocols and further strategic documents

Europe is still exposed to the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss. These are amplified by the war in Ukraine and the high increase in the cost of living experienced by people living in the Alpine region. Utilisation requirements to ensure greater self-sufficiency with regionally produced food and animal feed, the transition to renewable energies and the continuous use of land for housing, work, tourism, trade and transport are key challenges. As a limited resource that is only renewable over generations, soil is under particular pressure in the Alpine region for reasons such as limited potential permanent settlement area due to the mountainous topography, rapidly rising temperatures, more frequent natural disasters, trend towards urbanisation, abandonment, scrub encroachment and progressive reforestation of alpine pastures, competing interests in use for less and less available land. At the same time, there is growing concern about those issues.

The Working Group sees itself as an important voice for soil as a valuable and vulnerable resource in the Alpine region. Based on the "MAP 2023-2030", the "Long-term Action Plan for Soil Protection in the Alpine Region", the "Climate Action Plan 2.0" and other strategies, results are to be achieved during the mandate period that are in line with the Soil Protection Protocol and other protocols of the Alpine Convention, orientated towards the strategies of relevant cooperation partners, and taking into account recent EU regulations concerning soil protection (e.g. Soil Monitoring Law, Nature Restoration Law).

2. Planned topics and activities

Topic No. 1: TECHNICAL EXCHANGE ON SOIL ISSUES

Topic outline and objective until the XIX Alpine Conference

The starting point of the technical exchange on soil topics are the issues already dealt with in previous mandates. These will be expanded to include further current challenges for soil. The successful handling of all topics depends largely on the commitment and assumption of responsibility by the national delegations.

Envisaged activities (desk research, collection of good practices, workshop etc.)

Description

Tentative timeline

<p>a. EU soil-related laws: Identifying and emphasising Alpine-specific challenges and discussion of possible solutions/synergies between the Alpine countries for the implementation of soil-related EU legislation (Soil Monitoring Law, Nature Restoration Law) e.g. through technical exchanges with the relevant experts from the Alpine countries (by organising meetings, workshops, connecting the relevant experts, or preparing statements) on relevant issues such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. planned guidelines concerning the Soil Monitoring Law II. soil data, possibly about the models that are used 	<p>2025-2026 In charge: Austria with support of the EU</p>
<p>b. Soil protection on Alpine construction sites: Identification of national and field experts (via the WG soil protection), organisation of experts' workshop(s) and exchange of best practices</p>	<p>2025-2026 In charge: Switzerland</p>
<p>Expected outputs (report, brochure, exhibition etc.)</p>	
<p>ad a. Relevant outcomes of technical meetings, workshops, networking, statements on EU soil regulations with focus on Alpine-specific challenges ad b. Summary document</p>	
<p>Potential follow-up after the XIX Alpine Conference</p>	
<p>Evaluation, and where relevant improvement and continuation of activities on technical exchange including dissemination of outputs</p>	

<p>Topic No. 2: SOIL AWARENESS RAISING</p>
<p>Topic outline and objective until the XIX Alpine Conference (knowledge sharing, policy setting etc.)</p>
<p>Soil is a limited resource that is only renewable over generations and is under particular pressure, especially in the Alpine region (as described in the introduction). These facts are still not sufficiently known and are therefore not considered, or not enough. To increase soil awareness among decision-makers, interest groups, experts and planners, but also among the general public, more appropriate measures should be taken. The measures should be geared towards the needs of the respective target groups.</p> <p>Special attention is also paid to topics that emphasise the close connection between soil and other topics of the Alpine Convention such as nature conservation, spatial planning, agriculture and forestry, climate protection and water management, tourism, transport and energy.</p>
<p>Envisaged activities (desk research, collection of good practices, workshop etc.)</p>

<i>Description</i>	<i>Tentative timeline</i>
a. Preparation of a short and focused extract document from the Long-Term Action Plan	In 2025
b. Peatland Statement: dissemination in relevant networks	2025-2026
c. Impulses for national soil protection and spatial planning coaching events together with the Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development Working Group, based on the activities during the last two mandate phases	2025-2026
d. Synergies with projects, networks and programmes, such as other Thematic Working Bodies of the Alpine Convention (TWBs), Alpine Space Programme (ASP) projects, EUSALP Action Groups and the EU Mission "A Soil Deal for Europe", especially: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. ASP Project SOIL:OurInvisibleAlly b. With the ABB on the future Alpine Biodiversity Action Plan c. Possibly with other TWBs on communication fact sheets d. If relevant, on soil-relevant natural hazards with PLANALP and EUSALP AG 8 e. On soil relevant topics with EUSALP AG 6 	2025-2026
e. Participation in conferences, meetings, webinars, etc. and other activities that deal with soil issues relevant to the Alpine region and that are organised by other partners	2025-2026
Expected outputs (statement, report, brochure, exhibition etc.)	
<p>ad a. Brief extract from the LTAP</p> <p>ad b. Listing of dissemination activities of the Peatland Statement</p> <p>ad c. Coaching Events on national/regional/local level, organised by respective national delegations</p> <p>ad d. Cooperation results such as mutual feedback or involvement in respective activities, fact sheets</p> <p>ad e. Listing of the participation in various events</p>	
Potential follow-up after the XIX Alpine Conference	
Evaluation, and where relevant improvement and continuation of activities on soil awareness, dissemination of outputs	

3. TWB meetings schedule

Tentative dates and settings of meetings (month or quarter, online/in presence)
Approximately three meetings per year, some in person, some online in coordination with the national delegations

4. Cooperation

Planned cooperation with other Alpine Convention bodies and further relevant partners and processes, and the expected benefits

The Soil Protection Working Group sees itself as a platform for better and more intensive cooperation on soil issues in the Alpine region. The members of the working group represent a wide range of topics and have different access to soil-relevant networks, particularly at national or regional level in their respective countries. Even more intensive use of this potential in the future cooperation with stakeholders from different areas such as science, politics, administration, experts and planners, non-governmental organisations, but also on involving the population should be fostered. In particular, topic-specific cooperation is planned with other Thematic Working Bodies of the Alpine Convention, EUSALP action groups, the EU Mission "A Soil Deal for Europe", and with experts and stakeholders on soil-relevant provisions in the EU Soil Monitoring Law and the Nature Restoration Law.

5. Communication

Communication objectives, targets and respective planned measures

Knowledge about soil as a limited resource that is only renewable over generations, its numerous functions and the associated ecosystem services as well as the important cross-links to other areas of life must be publicised and disseminated widely. In addition to the usual formats such as face-to-face and online events and printed materials foreseen under part 2, social media will be used more in the future.

The members of the Working Group, together with their national partners and networks, will prepare technical content in such a way that different target groups such as land users, interest groups, decision-makers, the population and young people in particular are addressed.

6. Link to the Multi-Annual Work Programme 2023-2030 of the Alpine Conference

Contribution of the activities to some or all of the priority areas of the MAP 2023-2030 (interlinkages, synergies, and trade-offs with the specific objectives below)

MAP Priority area 1 – Biodiversity and ecosystems: *Contribute to the achievement of the European and international objectives to protect, preserve and restore biodiversity and ecosystems in the Alps; Strengthen the Alpine Convention's own biodiversity and ecosystem-related activities and integrate the topic into the work of all its bodies*

The two topics Soil Awareness Raising and Technical Exchange on Soil Issues will make valuable contributions to this MAP focus. A contribution on soil biodiversity to the Alpine Biodiversity Action Plan can be developed in cooperation with the Alpine Biodiversity Board.

MAP Priority area 2 – Climate action: *Implement the Climate Action Plan 2.0 on the way to reach climate-neutral and climate-resilient Alps by 2050; Pursue cross-sectoral activities and look for cooperation beyond the environmental and climate sector*

The two topics Soil Awareness Raising and Technical Exchange on Soil Issues will make valuable contributions to this MAP focus. Soil is especially relevant for climate action, as soil can be part of the solution for climate change mitigation and adaptation, soil can suffer from climate change and soil can aggravate climate change when managed in an insufficient way.

The planned dissemination of the Peatland Statement will contribute to the Climate Action Plan 2.0 Implementation Pathway "IP_S1: Preservation and sequestration of carbon in soil with a focus on peatlands, moorlands and wetlands", while the soil and spatial planning coaching events that are to be organised within the Alpine countries contribute to "IP_S3: Supporting measures to preserve and enhance Alpine soil quality".

MAP Priority area 3 – Quality of life: *Further the Alpine Convention's knowledge on the quality of life of people in the Alps, acknowledging and respecting territorial and individual differences; Promote the inclusion of quality-of-life measures in public policy-making processes at all territorial levels*

The two topics Soil Awareness Raising and Technical Exchange on Soil Issues will make valuable contributions to this MAP focus since vital soil is a crucial base for a good quality of life, e.g. for intact nature above the soil or for good quality food production.

7. Chair

The Chair will be held by Austria.