

Refugees and locals for the maintenance of alpine fens



Refugees from Bad Mitterndorf, Austria with local volunteers and experts after a successful action day in a fen with the large piles of greens removed in the background.
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Location

Municipalities: Wörschach, Bad Mitterndorf, Bad Aussee Regions: Ennstal, Ausseerland

Country

Austria

Short summarizing description

People with different backgrounds joined hands to maintain alpine fens in the Ennstal and Ausseerland region in Styria, Austria. The NGO Naturschutzbund Steiermark – district office Ennstal-Ausseerland organized public action days in the course of a LEADER project „Biotop maintenance of conservation areas“. With the help of refugees from Afghanistan, Syria, Mongolia, Iraq and Nigeria living in surrounding villages and local volunteers protected areas were restored. The respecting areas were mainly fens with high biodiversity inhabited by rare and endangered species. Unfortunately, the fens' hydrology is disturbed due to drainage systems installed by farmers. The purpose of the measures was to remove the again growing bushes and trees to give mosses and other typical plants and animals from fens space, like the endangered marsh fritillary (*Euphydryas aurinia*). Besides the nature conservation aspects the social component holds a high significance in this project.

Key Terms

Fens restoration, Teamwork, Refugees

Context and background, Which problems/challenges does your measure try to solve/cope with?

Fens used to shape the image of the region's landscape. During the last centuries farmer's drained most of them to make the land cultivable. The remaining pieces are valuable habitats for rare and endangered species. Due to the surrounding drainages the ecosystems can't sustain their hydrology themselves and bushes and small trees start growing. Another issue threatening regional ecosystems in protected areas are invasive neophytes, like Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*). The NGO «Naturschutzbund Steiermark» launched a project to solve these problems with

the help of voluntary participants. The refugees living in three surrounding villages on the other hand suffer from a lack of opportunities to take up meaningful functions in society.

Which are the key objectives of your measure?

The key objective of the measure is to preserve endangered alpine fens. This measure helps saving the habitats of rare and endangered species in an otherwise intensive agriculture without comparable habitats. It also brings together people of different backgrounds, helps the integration of refugees and to open the minds of villagers. Experts accompany the action days and pass on their knowledge about the special habitats of fens and their conservation. Reports about the action days and their results are published in local newspapers to inform the local public.

Who are the main target groups and beneficiaries of your measure?

Refugees living in three surrounding villages participated in the project. Locals from the region. NGO Naturschutzbund Steiermark representing nature conservation

Which actions have already been implemented and which results have been achieved so far?

Teams of refugees, locals and experts have worked on more than 23 hectares of fens to conserve these special habitats. Two places have been freed of the Japanese knotweed and *Impatiens glandulifera*. On 30 action days since 2015 innumerable bushes and small trees were cut and then removed from the areas. This is to lessen the nutrients scale in the bogs which are naturally low in nutrients. Few wood piles as refuges for insects, reptiles, birds or other shelter seeking animals have been established. An increase in the marsh fritillary populations has been noted in a long-term monitoring in the two years after the implementation of the measures. The refugees were highly motivated and despite the new approach to organizing projects and their differences in cultures and languages, under the expert's instructions they quickly formed a team and worked efficiently. Also the teamwork with the local villagers worked perfectly well and it was beneficial on a social level for both parties.

Which were the main problems and challenges you were/are facing when implementing the project and how did/do you (try to) overcome them?

The removal of the cut branches turned out to be complicated. As the project runs on a low budget these extra costs were hard to bring up. The large amounts of greens were removed by farmers or by the landowners. On smaller areas piles of wood were established as refuges for wild animals at the margins of the fens. The preliminary for the action days had to be worked out accurately as the refugees are only allowed to earn a certain amount of money per month. The overall organisation, e.g. transport, depended on the support of volunteers who support the refugees in their everyday life.

Link to website

<http://www.naturschutzbundsteiermark.at/1180/articles/biotoppflegeeinsatz-im-naturschutzgebiet-naglmoos-3149.html>

Starting date

2015-06-01

Duration

31 months

Regional scale

2 - small region (some municipalities, a mountain valley etc.)

Other involved partners

Landowners as co-operation partners, e.g. Österreichische Bundesforste AG (Austrian Federal Forests)

Contact person

Naturschutzbund Steiermark - Bezirksstelle Ennstal-Ausseerland (Nature conservation group Styria – district office Ennstal-Ausseerland)

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<http://www.naturschutzbundsteiermark.at/1180.html>

Category 3: Improving land use, nature ,protection and regional development

Nature protection often depends on small scaled hands-on measures in protected areas. The scattered bog rests of a once large wetland area need special measures that can only be pursued by hand. The migrant's manual skills most of them acquired from their jobs and home work in their origins helped them to meet the new tasks and challenges. Furthermore, a great deal of motivation and stamina are necessary to perform a whole day of physical work in unfavourable conditions like fens. It was a very necessary skill for the participants to work and act in teams. The migrant's ability to overcome their cultural, religious and verbal differences and form a team made the great progress in the project possible. The migrants had the opportunity to provide our project with their unique skills. This ranged from translation, leading a small group or mediating between participants to manual and technical skills.

Further Information



Refugees cutting and removing small spruces from the Ödensee fen in Ausseerland with the purple flowers of the devils' bit (*Succisa pratensis*), an important marsh fritillary larval host plant
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[Doc 1.jpg — 292Kb](#)

Informative article about the public action days in fens in a local newspaper «Woche» titled «Commitment for nature conservation in fen areas»