

Submitted Abstract

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Abstract

In the Alps, the UNESCO natural World Heritage site Swiss Alps Jungfrau-Aletsch (SAJA) was awarded in 2001 based on the criteria 'exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic significance', 'exceptional example of ecological and biological processes in progress' and 'exceptional example of the main stages of the Earth's history'. The area covers 824 km², encompasses 23 municipalities and contains 9 mountains above 4000 m a.s.l. including Eiger as one of the most famous peaks for mountaineering. According to the UNESCO, the outstanding universal values of world heritages must be preserved. In addition, SAJA's management aims for a sustainable touristic use. Firstly, visitor monitoring provides information on the current status of recreational use. Secondly, measures related to visitors' use should be implemented. For example, conflicts in intensively used areas should be identified and managed promptly, while in quiet and remote regions, visitor management should reveal conflict potential at an early stage so that measures can be implemented.

Due to the large area of the SAJA, several smaller focus areas were identified for the establishment of the visitor monitoring. These focus areas cover the spectrum from quiet high-altitude areas, such as alpine glaciers, to intensively used touristic areas, such as easily accessible and popular hiking areas. Methodically, focus areas were allocated to different categories based on their nature values and intensity of recreational use. Monitoring of selected indicators will provide periodically insights into the status of these focus areas in terms of recreational use. Additionally, the monitoring of key figures will deliver supplementary information on the overall development of recreational and touristic use in the whole SAJA region.

Based on the systematic visitor monitoring, administration of the SAJA will introduce a comprehensive visitor management within the next years. The concept, which will be developed participatory, will set goals for the development or the conservation of the areas based on their nature values and sensitivity to human disturbance.

This approach allows managers of large areas to address the needs for visitor monitoring and management stepwise and gain therefore knowledge for effective and accepted measures to enable valuable experiences in nature while conserving outstanding universal values at the same time.