



Media release

St. Gallen, 31 January 2020

The 2019 Alpine Protection Forest Award Helvetia goes to projects from Austria, Germany and Switzerland

At the award ceremony for the 14th Alpine Protection Forest Award Helvetia in St. Gallen, projects from Austria, Germany, Italy and Switzerland garnered prizes. Raphael Schwitter from St. Gallen was recognized as a protection-forest patron for his services to protection forests.

On 31 January 2020, the Consortium of Alpine Forestry Associations (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Alpenländischer Forstvereine) presented the 14th Alpine Protection Forest Award Helvetia. The members – forestry associations from Bavaria, Graubünden, Carinthia, Liechtenstein, St. Gallen, South Tyrol, Tyrol and Vorarlberg – present the award to exemplary protection forest projects.

In the presence of Bruno Cozzio, Vice President of the St. Gallen Cantonal Council and district forester of Uzwil, St. Gallen cantonal councillor Bruno Damann, as well as political and forestry representatives from St. Gallen, Liechtenstein, Tyrol, South Tyrol and Vorarlberg: Three projects received prizes in the categories "School projects", "PR work, innovation and protection forest partnerships" and "Successful projects" at the Pfalz Keller convention centre in St. Gallen. A "press prize" was also awarded for the first time. Furthermore, the Consortium of Alpine Forestry Associations selected a protection-forest patron for his services to protection forests.

16 projects were submitted from Germany, Italy, Austria and Switzerland. The international jury honoured the following projects and media reports with the Helvetia Alpine Protection Forest Award:



“School projects”

Vorarlberg: Project title: “Protection forest, clusters and avalanche barriers”

The Schillerstrasse primary school in Bregenz introduces children early and playfully to the concept of protection forest. Each class takes part in four tours per school year. The forest educator explains to the children the function of individual protection forest forms and shelters. They then go on to build models of a protection forest, a cluster structure and avalanche barriers. Natural materials found in the forest are used. As a final exercise, the children test if their models are fit for purpose: using stones, snow or sand.

“PR work, innovation and protection forest partnerships”

Graubünden: Project title: “Method for the monetary evaluation of the impact of wildlife on protection forests”

Damage caused by browsing wildlife has long-term implications for protection forests. This is generally known but quantifying the consequences is difficult. That factor prompted Nora Zürcher-Gasser to develop a suitable method as the topic of her master's thesis. Applying this method, the impact of the damage caused by browsing wildlife over a period of 50 years can be estimated and financially evaluated. Various protection forests have already been assessed with this method. The findings of the Graubünden case studies are also incorporated into the cantonal forest wildlife reports. The monetary evaluation meets two objectives: First, it is important for protection forest management. Second, it lends more objectivity to the often highly emotional forest wildlife debate.

“Press prize”

3sat, ZDF, ORF, SRF and ARD: “Nano Special: Forest of the Future”

Dispassionately, yet very transparently and succinctly, Nano Special presents strategies for the forest of the future. Various emotive, professionally sound stories are used to illustrate the numerous and diverse functions of the forest. The central theme is the steps needed to preserve forests in the face of climate change. The motto is “Don't just talk, act”. Summer storms and other tangible climatic changes and challenges are explained. Ways in which each individual can help are also presented. The sense of humour demonstrated by the Nano Special creators was what won the jury over.

“Successful projects”

From Tyrol: Project title: “50 years of protection forest management: the Schmirn avalanches”

Countless avalanche zones and torrents pose a threat to the populace of the Schmirn valley. Above all in the 1950s and 1960s, devastating avalanche catastrophes left a question mark over the valley's future. In the past 50 years, avalanche barriers, high-altitude afforestation and measures to make the protection forest more effective have substantially improved the safety of the residential areas and transport routes. Joint efforts by forest owners, farmers, hunters and the authorities have halted migration out of the valley.

The jury's “special prize”

From South Tyrol: Project title: “Water body stewardship concept for the Lower Ahr/floodplain woodland - a protection forest on the valley floor”

At the Lower Ahr between Mühlen and Bruneck, gravel was removed from the riverbed. This changed the high-water regimen. One option to protect the residential areas in St. Georgen from flooding would have been to build artificial retention basins. But local farmers and politicians were against that. Instead, a project to revitalize floodplain woodland has been underway for some 20 years now. This solution is both broad-based and sustainable. It ensures three things: flood protection, greater biodiversity and natural recreational areas by the Ahr. The tangible successes achieved are creating an appetite for more.



Raphael Schwitter is the fifth protection forest patron

For the fifth time, the Consortium of Alpine Forestry Associations have awarded the title of "protection-forest patron". This year St. Gallen native Raphael Schwitter from Pfäfers SG, above Bad Ragaz, has been honoured for his services to Switzerland's protection forests. As a teacher at the Forestry School in Maienfeld, he attached great importance to passing on his forest know-how to young people. And as head of the mountain forestry department – as well as in his private life – he oversaw a large number of forest projects, including in particular reforestation in the aftermath of several severe storms. He worked closely with researchers at ETH Zurich.

Find the interview with Raphael Schwitter here:

www.helv.me/protectionforestpatron2019

The 2019 Helvetia Protection Forest Award – the winners at a glance

- School projects category:
Protection forest, clusters and avalanche barriers, Vorarlberg.
- PR work, innovation and protection forest partnerships category:
Method for the monetary evaluation of the impact of wildlife on protection forests, Graubünden.
- Successful projects category:
50 years of protection forest management: the Schmirn avalanches, Tyrol.
- The jury's special prize:
Water body stewardship concept for the Lower Ahr/floodplain woodland - a protection forest on the valley floor, South Tyrol.
- Press prize:
Nano Special: Forest of the Future
- Protection-forest patron:
Raphael Schwitter, St. Gallen.

This media release is also available on our website

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Alpine Protection Forest Award Helvetia emphasizes the importance of woodland

The Alpine Protection Forest Award Helvetia (Alpiner Schutzwaldpreis Helvetia) seeks to make people more aware of the importance of protection forests and to commend projects making a special contribution to this type of woodland. In many parts of the Alps, it is thanks to protection forests that people are able to live and work in these regions at all. The Protection Forest Award was established by the Consortium of Alpine Forestry Associations. Since 2011, Helvetia has been actively involved in the preservation of protection forests and the afforestation of these areas. Thanks to the projects it has supported, a total of around 430'000 trees have been planted in Germany, Italy, Austria and Switzerland. The Helvetia insurance group has been the main sponsor of the Alpine Protection Forest Award since 2014. The company has for many years been committed to the maintenance and retention of Alpine protection forest.

St. Gallen Forestry Association

The St. Gallen Forestry Association – the organizer of this year's Alpine Protection Forest Award – is an association under private law whose members are foresters that have successfully completed forestry training, are engaged in practical employment in the forest, or are in training. Established in 1899, the Association's aim is to bring together St. Gallen's entire body of forestry personnel and to represent their interests. It is committed to the promotion of agroforestry and wood sciences, is actively involved in forestry policymaking, and keeps the general public informed on forest matters.

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Helvetia is active in the life and non-life business, and also offers customised specialty lines and reinsurance cover. Its business activities focus on retail customers as well as small and medium-sized companies and larger corporates. With some 6,600 employees, the company provides services to more than 5 million customers. With a business volume of CHF 9.07 billion, Helvetia generated an IFRS result after tax of CHF 431.0 million in financial year 2018. The registered shares of Helvetia Holding are traded on the SIX Swiss Exchange under the symbol HELN.



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