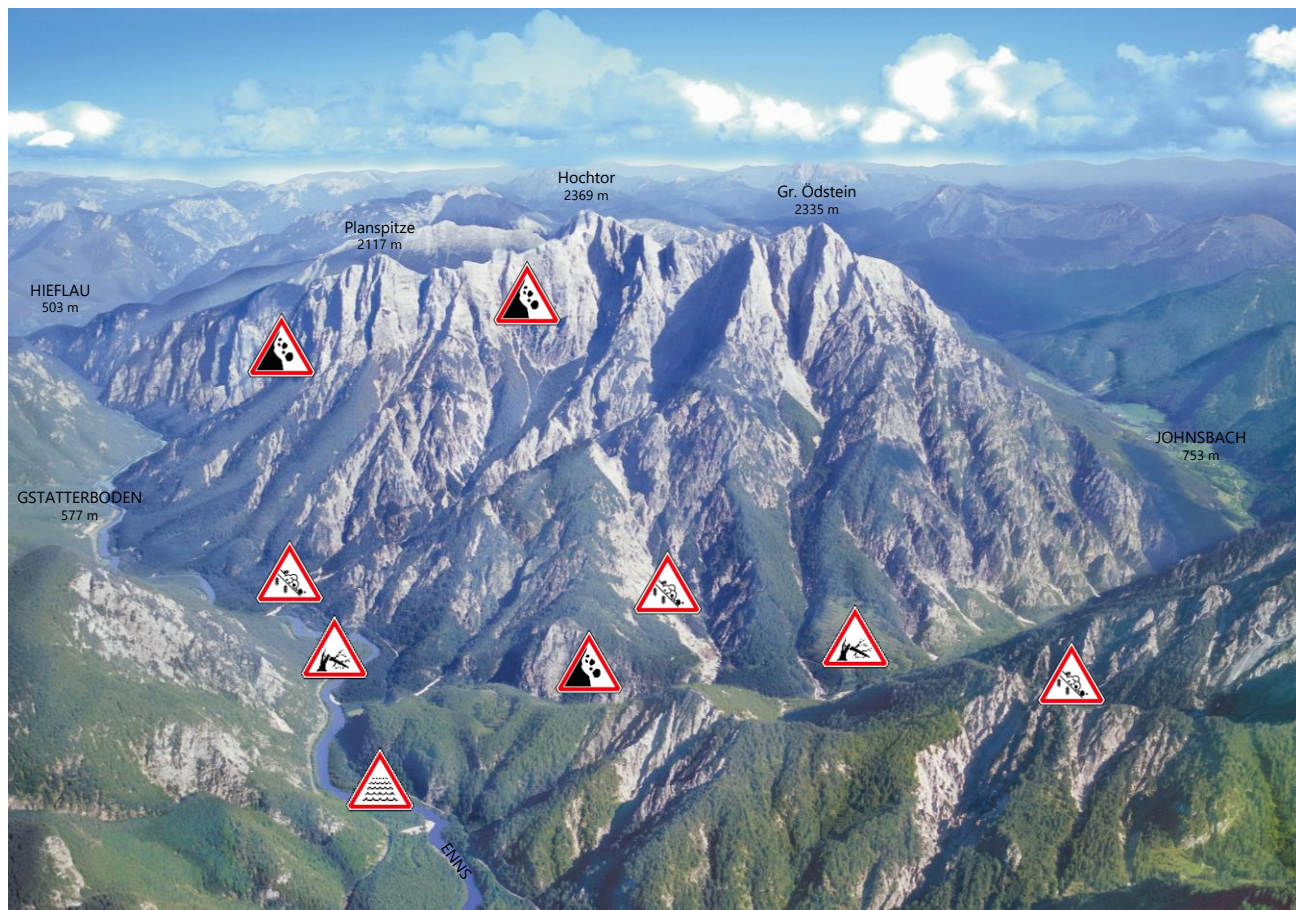


# Diversity through wilderness

## The only constant is change

*The wilderness in Gesäuse National Park is home to a unique variety of life. This diversity has developed over millions of years. Animals and plants have to keep adapting to constant changes in their environment.*



### Return to wilderness

Natural processes such as avalanches, trees blown over by the wind or flooding are accepted in the national park. Nature is allowed to develop freely in three-quarters of the national park's area:

- A forest grows old, dies and grows again.
- A river overflows its banks and transforms its surroundings.
- An avalanche creates structure, diversity and new habitats.

The role of the national park is to let natural processes prevail, to research and document them in order to be able to understand them better.

Don't panic – visitor safety comes first and ranks higher than protecting natural processes. Where the protection of hikers can no longer be guaranteed or where natural phenomena have made paths impassable, the national park intervenes.

### Helping people help themselves

In a small part of the national park, we've given nature a small helping hand:

- We thinned single-species spruce forests to make room for beech and fir trees.
- On the Johnsbach river, we dismantled bank structures so that the river can flow where it wants.

## A catastrophe! (or not?)

Landslides, avalanches or floods immediately suggest devastation and catastrophic effects. However, such forces of nature are not a catastrophe for nature itself - nor for the national park. Avalanches etc. are natural processes that characterise and shape the landscape.

Avalanches with their tremendous formative power are a frequent natural process in the Gesäuse region. They can prevent the natural regeneration of trees if they occur regularly. This creates forest-free flowering areas with remarkable biodiversity. More than 700 species of butterflies live in an avalanche gully on Tamischbachturm mountain and more than 70 species of plants have been found within a few square meters.



A landslide with its mixture of water, mud and rocks also has enormous potential for destruction. But that's okay in the national park!

Due to the two main types of rock – both slightly weathered - that are found in the Gesäuse region (Dachstein limestone, Wetterstein dolomite), there are regular rock slides. Large amounts of rock material tumble towards the valley. The resulting rubble channels are unique habitats and particularly worthy of protection, as they have now become rare due to construction work and gravel removal.



Heavy rainfall and snowmelt in spring cause the rivers Enns and Johnsbach to burst their banks. But these floods are also welcome, because they are the only way that floodplain or 'alluvial' forests and gravel banks with their characteristic species can survive in the long term.

## Forest becomes wild again

A windblown or bark beetle-infested forest may look devastating from the outside. But it is precisely these natural processes that make a significant contribution to forest renewal in the national park and enable the structure of forests to remain diverse over the years.

The sudden removal of the protective tree layer and the resulting radical change in soil climate trigger an explosion of flora and fauna species. Over time, the newly-created habitat is taken over by countless animal and plant species, which then recede again. There is no tidying up: dead trees are allowed to remain. Forests rich in standing and lying deadwood provide a crucial habitat for over 4,000 different species.



All this means that areas of windblown and bark beetle-infested trees present an amazing opportunity to increase biodiversity.

## How can I help?

Humans have the urge to control the unpredictable and apparently messy by any means necessary. In the national park, however, letting go has nothing to do with allowing things to collapse or die, but rather with letting things live. It's worth humans changing their point of view a little and looking at some things from a different perspective.

Judge this in open terrain for yourself. If there is a threatening storm however, don't put yourself in unnecessary danger!

## Ich want to learn more!

Find more details on our website at:

<https://nationalpark-gesaeuse.at/en/national-park-enclosures/research-and-monitoring/>