



SOTA activations

IN SWISS PROTECTED AREAS

Arthur Schwilch | HB9CEV | 15.01.2023

Introduction

In Switzerland there are hundreds of protected areas which are divided into many different categories. If you would show them all on a map, a big part of the country would be covered with them. As a SOTA activator you will sooner or later be confronted with these protected areas. Suddenly you are standing in front of a board, you have a gut feeling that you should study it carefully, but time is pressing, you want to get to the summit and finally radio ...

Switzerland is a very densely populated country. Developments of rural regions, tourism as well as various outdoor activities have massively increased in our society in the last decades (as well as SOTA). Habitats for animals and plants, characteristic landscapes and much more are increasingly threatened. The goal of protected areas is the protection of fauna and flora, the preservation and enhancement of the cultural and natural landscape, and they also serve education and research. A clear protection goal and appropriate measures allow a considerate use for all. Legal foundations for the protected areas are almost always in place. The legal texts are sometimes difficult to understand for the layman, the correct interpretation is not always easy. But even rules without a legal basis should be respected.

Specifically, there are some special protection areas whose regulations may have an impact on our activity (others have no impact, e.g. the UNESCO World Heritage Site Sardona does not affect our activity in any way). Protected areas that may affect our activities, however, are mainly the following:

- Hunting reserves
- Wildlife Sanctuaries
- Wildlife Rest Areas
- Winter dormancy zones (LI)
- National Park
- Pro Natura nature reserves
- ...

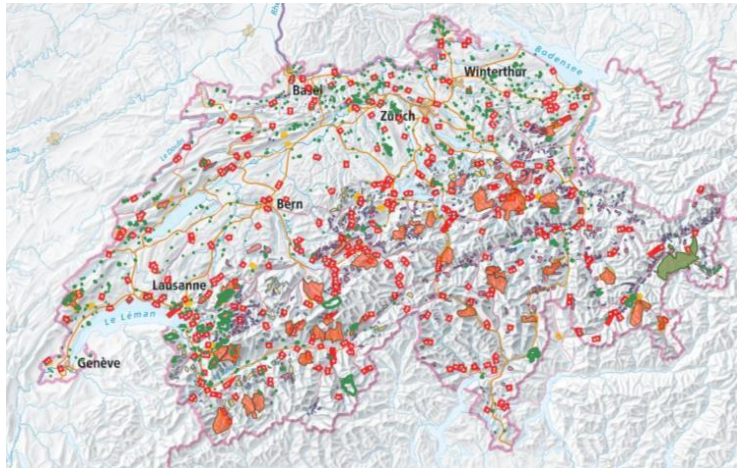
This document is intended to be a brief guide, it presents sources of information, mentions tips on how to prepare for an activation and how to behave in a protected area. It also briefly discusses roadblocks. In the last part some examples are given.

Information on protected areas

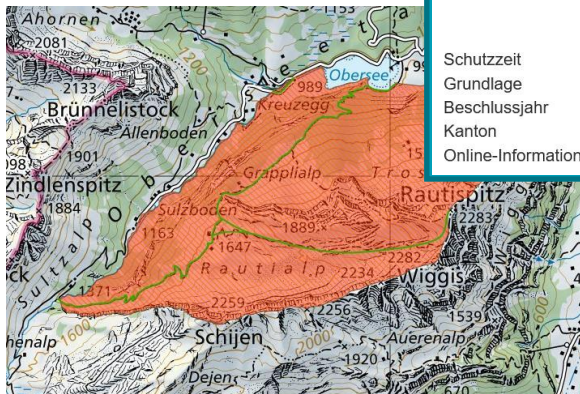
On geo.admin (federal geoportal from the Federal Office of Topography or Swisstopo for short) you can find an almost endless amount of map material and information on protected areas. Other platforms such as SOTLAS, Skitouren guru, the SAC tour portal, SchweizMobil etc. access the majority of the data from Swisstopo. The swisstopo app also naturally uses the data from

Swisstopo. All maps and other geodata are free of charge from 1.3.2021 (Open Government Data strategy). For geo.admin a current browser and internet access is required, no software installation or download is necessary.

If you now show all the above mentioned and for us important protected areas on geo.admin (incl. road closures), Switzerland looks like this (here is a [link to](#) try it yourself). The different layers (types of protected areas) can be selected under *Menu -> Geocatalog -> Nature and Environment*.



If other types of protected areas (e.g. BLN, Federal Inventory for Landscape Protection, UNESCO World Heritage, etc.) were to be displayed, Switzerland would be covered to a large extent. If you want to find more information about a specific area, you can zoom out and select this area. In the popup, further information can be found. Here, for example, the [wildlife sanctuary Rauti-Tross](#) at Rautispitz [HB/GL-029](#):



Wildtierschutzgebiete (Bundesamt für Umwelt BAFU)	
Jagdbanngebiet	Rauti-Tros (Nr. 14.00)
Schutzstatus	rechtsverbindlich
Bestimmungen	Schneesportarten verboten ausserhalb markierter Pisten, Routen und Loipen
Zusatzinformationen	Hunde sind an der Leine zu führen; der Betrieb von Drohnen ist verboten; freies Zelten und Campieren ist verboten; kantonale Bewilligung erforderlich für sportliche Anlässe (gemäss Art. 5 VEJ)
Schutzzeit	01.01.-31.12.
Grundlage	Verordnung über die Eidg. Jagdbanngebiete (VEJ)
Beschlussjahr	1991
Kanton	GL
Online-Informationen	Link

In this example, the map shows the protected area in red and the permitted snow sports routes in green. In the popup, the rules are listed briefly and clearly. This is the fastest way to find useful information. Very important and helpful are the winter corridors for snow sports. Only on these corridors you can cross the area with snowshoes, skis, snowboards etc. when there is snow. When there is no snow one should use the summer trails. The reason for this is that the game is very stressed especially when there is snow, they can hardly find food and the escape through the snow is very draining on their strength. The game gets used to the corridors with the mountain walkers, can move to other areas and is therefore less stressed.

With this method, you can quickly find the necessary information about a protected area on geo.admin. The data is constantly updated by Swisstopo. Of course, there are many other sources on the Internet. Authorities, nature conservation associations and tourist organizations have also produced a lot of documentation on protected areas. However, accessing the geo.admin website is one of the most efficient ways to get the information quickly.



Road blocks



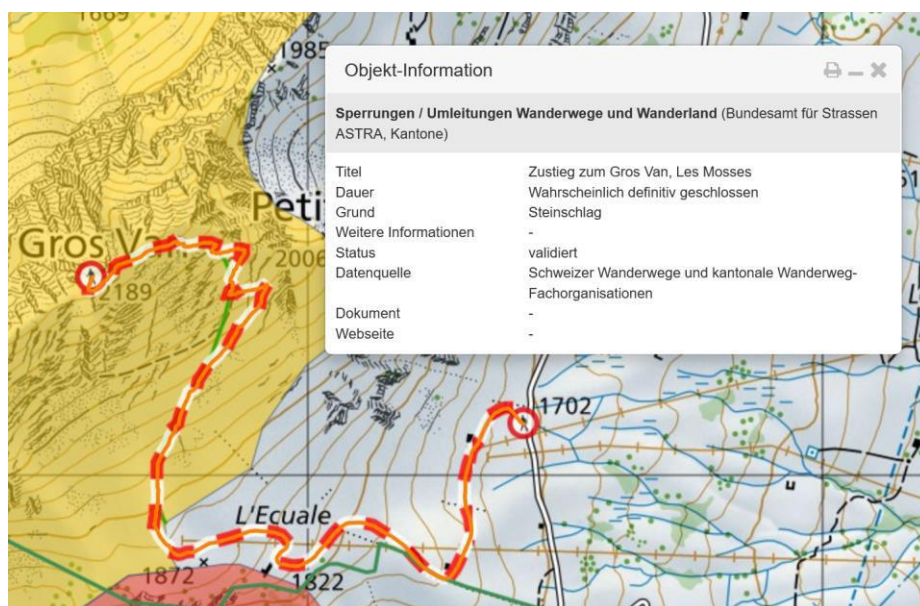
Trail closures can be very unpleasant, especially if you are not prepared for them and suddenly find yourself in front of a closed section of trail.

When trails are closed in steep terrain over the winter, safety ropes, railings, etc. are often also dismantled, as these can otherwise be destroyed by the masses of snow and by falling rocks during the melting period. It can therefore quickly become dangerous if you walk along a closed path anyway.

The reasons for road closures are as follows:

- Closures during the breeding or seeding season of endangered species
- Winter closures for the protection of animals
- Closures due to rockfall (dwindling permafrost)
- Closures during maintenance and construction work
- Closures during forest work
- Closures due to military exercises
- ...

Road closures can also be displayed on geo.admin and by selecting them you will find more information about this closure in a popup. Here is an example of a block at Gros Van [HB/VD-017](#):



Apparently, the [path to the Gros Van](#) is currently closed due to rockfall. Since the Gross Van is also still in a game rest zone and there is no alternative route, this summit is probably (legally) no longer feasible!?. Currently, a winter route is still marked on the map, with enough snow and low temperatures, this southeast slope is possibly feasible with the skis or snowshoes.

Not every road closure is visible on geo.admin. If a road closure is not reported to the Federal Office, it cannot be displayed. Short-term closures due to forestry work etc. are also not visible, but in these situations there are usually marked notices and detours on site.

Some more examples

The following few examples should show that it can be quite worthwhile to prepare well for a tour with regard to the protected areas.

NATIONAL PARK

In the Swiss National Park, pretty much everything that can be forbidden is forbidden. No winter sports, no bikes, no camping, no fire, no trails may be left, no dogs ...



There are a total of 15 SOTA peaks in the Swiss National Park (or on its border) (see also <https://hbgsota.ch/hbff/>).

There are a total of 21 hiking routes in the national park, all of which are closed in winter (information about the routes can be found [here](#)).

Part of the national park boundary is marked white-yellow-white. Attention: do not cross! (on the way to Munt Buffalore [HB/GR-368](#)).

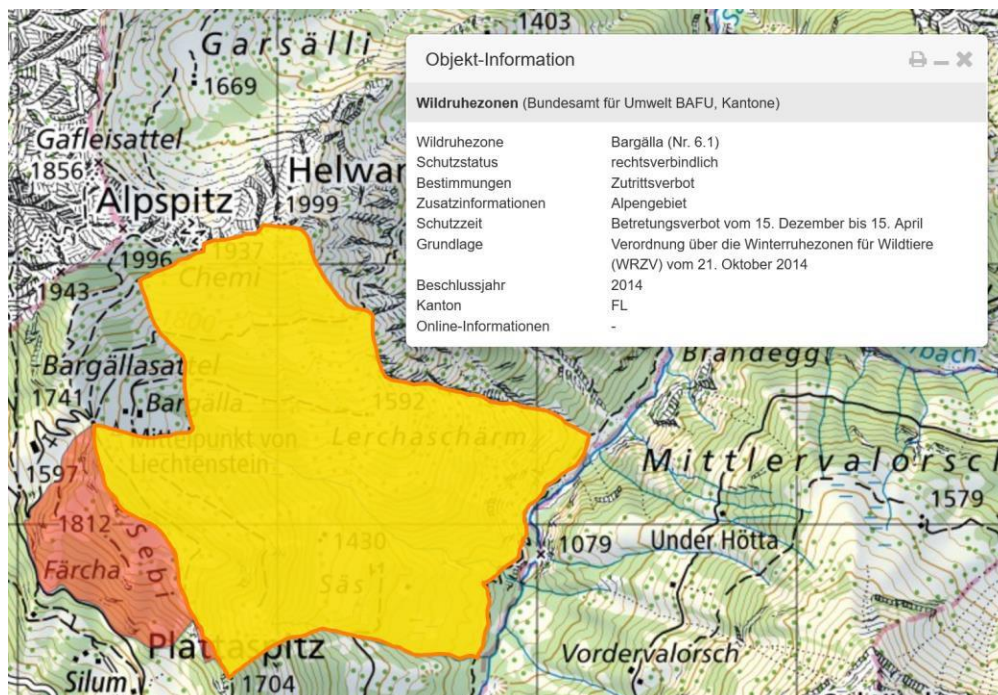


HELWANGSPITZ [HBo/LI-011](#)

The Helwangspitz is located in a Liechtenstein winter dormancy zone. Here you can not go to the summit between 15.12. and 15.4. The only path is closed during this time (during one third of the year!).

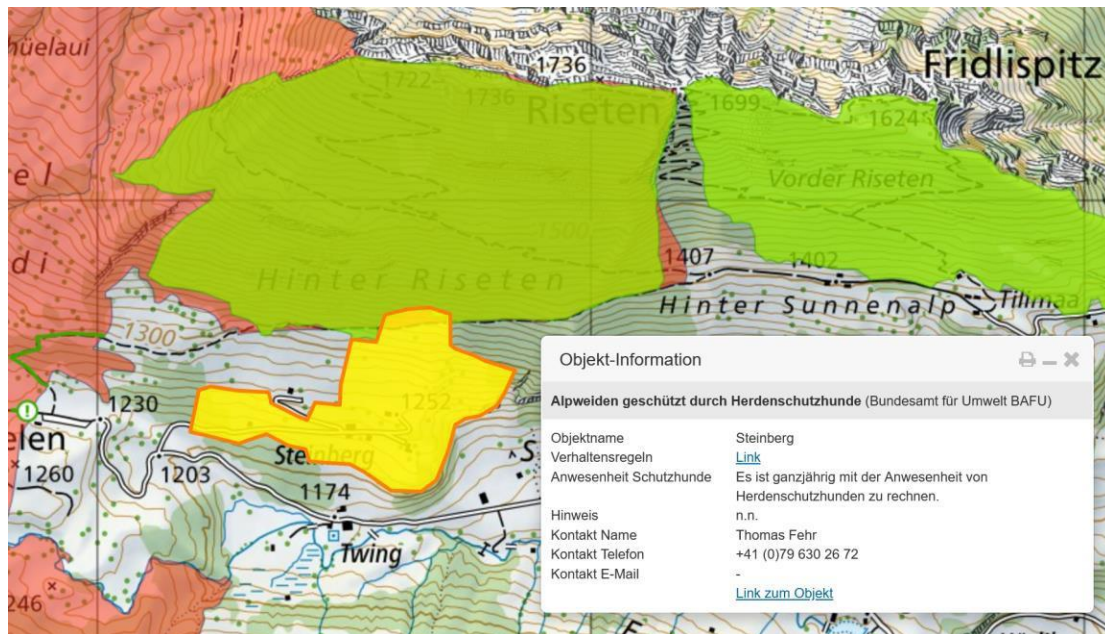


If you want to get information in advance, you can find this info on [geo.admin](#):



RISETEN HB/GL-047

If you want to go on the [Riseten](#), you have to cross a **game rest zone**, a **forest reserve** and a **guard dog area**! The popup when selecting the herd protection dog area contains further information and a link to the rules of conduct.



Summary

The above examples show nicely that good preparation can often be worthwhile. A few more rules are compiled below:

- If you are planning an activation in a region that is still unknown to you (especially in winter or in pathless terrain), do a quick check on [geo.admin](#)
- Often you can find also on the respective SOTLAS summit page corresponding notes and photos to the protected areas
- Study the boards on site and follow the rules (the authorities have a duty to inform and must signal protected areas with boards accordingly)
- Adhere to the [Sota regulations](#): "All Expeditions must use legitimate access routes and comply with any local rules regarding use of the land" (Pt. 3.7) and to the Sota Code of Conduct (Pt. 3.7.3)

"I hope this information helps you and wish you all great Activations and beautiful nature experiences ... 73 de Arthur HB9CEV"



Ils Chamins' in the National Park, on the way to Piz Foraz HB/GR-170