



COUNCIL OF EUROPE LANDSCAPE CONVENTION
LANDSCAPE AWARD OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

9th Session – 2025-2026

APPLICATION FORM

State Party: Switzerland

Presentation

The Council of Europe Landscape Convention is the first international treaty to be exclusively concerned with all aspects of landscape: natural, rural, urban and peri-urban. It represents an important contribution to the implementation of the Council of Europe's objectives. By taking into account the value of landscapes, with their natural and human components, the Council of Europe acknowledges that the landscape is an important part of the quality of life for people everywhere: in degraded areas as well as in areas of high quality, in areas recognised as being of outstanding beauty as well as everyday areas.

The 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government, held in Reykjavik on 16 – 17 May 2023, recognised “the urgency of additional efforts to protect the environment, as well as to counter the impact of the triple planetary crisis of pollution, climate change and loss of biodiversity on human rights, democracy and the rule of law.” It committed the Council of Europe to strengthening work on the human rights aspects of the environment and initiate the Reykjavik process of focusing and strengthening the work of the Council of Europe in this field, as laid down in Appendix V of the Reykjavik Declaration on “The Council of Europe and the environment”.

Appendix V of the Reykjavik Declaration references the Landscape Convention to highlight that “landscape has an important public interest role in the cultural, ecological, environmental and social fields and is a key element of individual and social well-being, and that landscape protection, management and planning entail rights and responsibilities for everyone.”

Article 11 of the Convention establishes the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe. The Resolution CM/Res(2008)3 on the rules governing the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 20 February 2008 at the 1018th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies, draws attention to the fact that Article 11 of the Convention institutes the Award and that it is in keeping with the work carried out by the Council of Europe concerning human rights, democracy and sustainable development.

Opened to the Parties to the Convention, the Award is intended to raise civil society's awareness of the value of landscapes, of their role and of changes to them. Its objective is to reward exemplary practical initiatives aimed at successful landscape quality objectives on the territories of the Parties to the Convention. The Award is conferred every two years and the files presenting applications must reach the Secretariat General of the Council of Europe.

At its meeting held in Strasbourg on 28-29 April 2008, the Steering Committee for Cultural Heritage and Landscape (CDPATEP) decided that applications should be submitted to the Council of Europe Secretariat through the Permanent Representations of the Parties to the Convention.

Each State Party to the Convention is thus invited to send by post to the Secretariat General of the Council of Europe (Council of Europe Landscape Convention), no later than 31 December 2025, via its Permanent Representation to the Council of Europe, a completed application form in paper format, together with a digital copy on a USB key of the form and additional material.

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Please note that:

- participation to the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe is only open to local and regional authorities and their groupings and non-governmental organisations, as stated in the Resolution CM/Res (2008)3, Appendix, Article 2;*
- the application form must be completed in all its parts, in one of the two official languages of the Council of Europe (English or French);*

- *the materials submitted must be copyright-free, for use by the Council of Europe in communications aimed at promoting the Award or any other publications or activities relating to the Convention. The Council of Europe undertakes to cite the authors' names;*
- *files that are incomplete or fail to comply with the rules will not be taken into consideration.*

For further information please visit the Landscape Award section of the Council of Europe website:

[Convention du Conseil de l'Europe sur le paysage / Site web officiel \(coe.int\)](#)

[Council of Europe Landscape Convention / Official website \(coe.int\)](#)

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I. STATE CONCERNED AND APPLICANT

1. State

Switzerland

Represented by

Mr Gilles Rudaz

Address:

Swiss Federal Office for the Environment FOEN
Biodiversity and Landscape Division
3003 Bern

Telephone:

+41 58 462 9385

E-mail:

gilles.rudaz@bafu.admin.ch

2. Applicant

Verein Birsstadt

*Name of the local,
regional authority(ies)
or NGO(s)*

- ☒ Local / regional authority project
☐ NGO Project

Website of the Applicant (if exists)

www.birsstadt.swiss

Represented by

Ms. Gelgia Herzog

Address:

Verein Birsstadt
Domplatz 8
4144 Arlesheim
Switzerland

Telephone:

+41 (0)79 777 4299

E-mail:

info@birsstadt.swiss

II. PRESENTATION OF THE PROJET

3. Name of the Project

Birspark Landschaft

4. Location of the Project

The Birspark Landschaft (Landscape) in the agglomeration of Basel stretches along the Birs river from Birsfelden to Grellingen forming the green backbone of the growing Birsstadt metropolitan region. The Birsstadt comprises the following 10 municipalities: Aesch, Arlesheim, Birsfelden, Dornach, Duggingen, Grellingen, Münchenstein, Muttenz, Pfeffingen and Reinach. Dornach is located in the Canton of Solothurn, while the other nine municipalities are in the Canton of Basel-Landschaft.

The Birspark Landschaft is an intensively used local recreation area and at the same time a place with high biodiversity and valuable habitats that should remain as undisturbed as possible. For many years the municipalities of Birsstadt have been committed to protecting this valuable natural environment while also creating high-quality recreational areas.

5. Summary of the Project (10-12 lines)

The Birspark Landschaft is an intensively used local recreation area and at the same time a place with high biodiversity and valuable habitats that should remain as undisturbed as possible. For many years the municipalities of Birsstadt have been committed to protecting this valuable natural environment while also creating high-quality recreational areas.

I The protection and restoration of the natural environment through flagship projects and inter-municipal measures was formally anchored in the 2016 Action Plan, making these objectives binding for the authorities. According to this Action Plan, the municipalities work together along the following key objectives:

-The Birsstadt municipalities preserve and promote the shared landscape along the Birs with diverse and attractive recreational areas and rich natural spaces.

-They will create recreational areas along the Birs for various user groups, which are well connected to the surrounding settlements and landscapes.

-They aim to preserve and enhance the natural landscape along the Birs with diverse, interconnected habitats with high biodiversity, while also promoting awareness of these natural values.

The Verein Birsstadt has received multiple awards for the Birspark Landschaft project.

6. **Photo representing the Project** (*high definition – JPEG 350 dpi*) and name of the author of the photo please

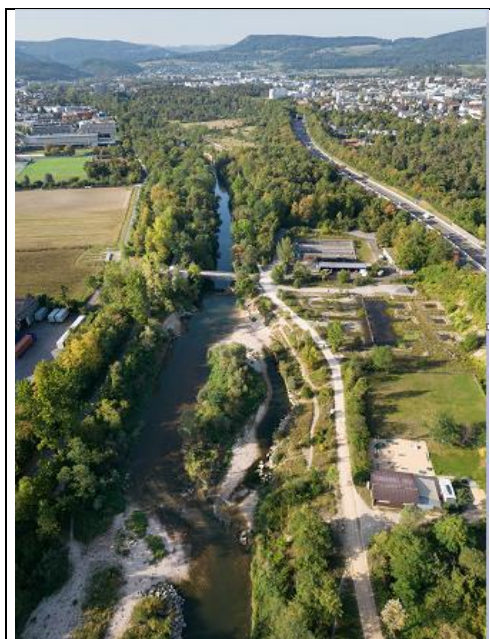


Image Source: Gaëtan Bally/Keystone/Schweizer Heimatschutz

7. **Website of the Project** (*if exists*)

www.birsstadt.swiss/projekte/birspark-landschaft

III. CONTENT OF THE PROJECT

8. **Start of the Project** month year

The project must have been completed at least three years previously

9. **End of the Project** month year

The project must have been completed at least three years previously

10. **Partners**

Birsstadt municipalities
Canton Basel-Landschaft
Environmental NGOs and fishing associations

11. Financing bodies

Birsstadt municipalities
Canton Basel-Landschaft
Swiss Federal Office for the Environment
Private environmental foundations in the flagship projects
Development gain contribution

12. Central aims of the Project

What are the main objectives of the project regarding landscape?

How does the project contribute to the implementation of the Convention at the national level or transnational level?

The project aims to maintain and improve the continuous river landscape as a coherent green corridor, offering both rich natural habitats and diverse, attractive recreational spaces.

The Birspark Landschaft Action Plan corresponds to a landscape development concept, extended to include the recreational aspects. It contains a detailed catalog of measures for a defined landscape area.

The following challenges arise in the Birs area:

-The area along the Birs river is intensively used for recreation, but faces certain shortcomings: There is a lack of attractive places to linger, and access is difficult in some locations. With a growing population in the Birsstadt, conflicting interests face the Birspark Landschaft; e.g. public access versus nature conservation interests.

-In terms of natural values, the Birspark Landschaft is characterized by a high diversity of endangered species and habitats and, as well as nature reserve areas; of which one is of national importance (Reinacherheide).

-Particular dryland habitats, such as semi-arid meadows, are seldomly connected anymore. Isolated populations of endangered and protected species rely on habitat connectivity.

The Birspark Landschaft Action Plan addresses not only key objectives but provides a suit of measures for the areas of recreation, habitats and landscape and also inter-municipal cooperation. Each participating municipality is to implement at least one major, so-called flagship project. This project will serve as a model and an example and is intended to combine the areas of recreation and nature conservation.

The Action Plan was approved 2016 by all participating municipal councils as a guideline concept for all authorities. The Action Plan is being implemented continuously since then. Where necessary and appropriate, the plan is adapted to current circumstances and needs.

The joint development of the Action Plan was part of a long-lasting process starting in 2005 and led to the founding of the «Birsstadt» (10 municipalities) in the year of 2018.

13. Type of the Project

Describe the nature/type of the project:

Does it focus on landscape protection and management, or does it involve landscape planning, or both?

Is the project related to specific measures or to a landscape public policy?

Is it implemented at a national level or a transnational level?

The Birspark Landschaft project encompasses landscape protection, planning and management. In 2016, the Action Plan specified which natural and recreational areas along the Birs river were to be developed. It was recognized that the last remaining natural areas should be protected rather than sacrificed for urban expansion. Through flagship projects, the participating municipalities outlined how they intend to shape these natural areas in the future. This is being achieved through a balanced combination of recreation and nature conservation.

Main Flagship Projects from the Birspark Landschaft Action Plan:

Muttenz: Schänzli Nature and Recreation Area

The project revitalizes the Birs by expanding the watercourse beyond the current narrow river channel and restoring as much natural freedom as possible. It creates an attractive bathing and play area, ensures groundwater protection, and establishes diverse ecological niches including shallow water zones, deep pools, and a low-water channel for the species inhabiting in the Birs.

Different habitats and ecotones are nested and patchworked along the new floodplain land- and riverscape. The public space and access to various areas is subtly controlled thanks to a carefully designed layout and selected planting. In the northern part, near the urbanized Hagnau plot, a pavilion and an area for small events welcome a larger number of visitors. Towards the south of the Schänzli and the existing bird reserve «Vogelhölzli» public access is limited. This is ensured by fine-tuned visitor guidance concept, for example via wooden walkways and deadwood hedges (Benjes hedges).

This project strongly promotes ecologically valuable habitats and allows fascinating insights into the flora and fauna.

The future Schänzli nature and recreation park covers an area of approximately 100'000 m². It was conceived as part of the Hagnau-Schänzli area development plan and thus complements the urbanized Hagnau East and West plots in the direct neighbourhood. Financial support is primarily provided by the Hagnau landowners and implementation is closely coordinated with the construction phases on the Hagnau sites.

Münchenstein: Mühlematt

The Mühlematt area includes the banks of the Birs river, forest, agricultural land, a creek, and various walking, riding, hiking, and cycling trails. Given this complexity of usages, the municipality sought to achieve a better balance between the needs and stresses of land use and landscape conservation.

The Mühlematt chain of ponds along the border to Muttenz, for example, supports the migration of amphibians. One pond is open to public access and allows visitors to observe the local flora and fauna on-site. The lower reaches of the Teufelgrabenbach-creek, allows children to dig in and get in touch with flowing waters. Niches for diverse wildlife have also been deliberately created.

Reinach: Nature and Adventure pond

The facility opened in summer 2020. It is structured around a large, comb-shaped pond and 3 nature-conservation ponds. This flagship project by the municipality of Reinach achieves several goals at once:

Recreational use: Benches, stools, a fountain, and an observation platform invite visitors to

linger and observe. Deadwood hedges (Benjes hedges) separate the public access from the wildlife refuge. In front of the hedges, young and old are welcome to gently explore nature. Behind the hedge, the flora and fauna remains undisturbed.

Aesch: Groundwater recharge facility Kuhweid

The Kuhweid groundwater recharge facility has been gradually upgraded to meet ecological standards.

As a first step, the municipality increased the diversity of tree species on site and at the edge of the adjacent forest by planting a dozen different native shrub species. Previously, a single species - red dogwood - had dominated this area. To allow the new shrubs to grow, all the red dogwood was removed. Other existing woody species were spared and left untouched. This was followed by a strip of dry meadow and small structures such as piles of stones and branches to provide shelter for small animals.

Finally, the municipality created a raised and covered seating area outside the fenced area, the so-called Birswarte, together thus offering an attractive view of the grounds and the Birs area.

Further Flagship Projects:

Arlesheim: Pocket-Parks

In the newly developing «uptownBasel» area, small parks and connecting green spaces are being created by uptownBasel AG on the initiative of the municipality. The vegetation plots are intended to serve as local recreation areas and provide a pleasant working environment. In addition, these green plots create an attractive connection between the uptown campus and the Birs. Green planning helps to preserve ecological habitats, create new ones, and secure them for the long term. The municipality of Arlesheim places great importance to a large proportion of native plant species.

Dornach: Upgrading of the Birsbogen floodplain

The last natural floodplain of the Birs river between Angenstein and Birsköpflü has to be preserved and enhanced in its unique form with its characteristic flora and fauna. Around that natural area (approx. 20,000 m²) lies on the west river shore one of Aesch's commercial zones, and to the east the Wydeneck development site, which is expected to set new accents in the future. The land is already under considerable usage pressure and therefore needs to be balanced carefully with the concerns of nature conservation.

Grellingen: Revitalization of the «Inseli» (small island)

The «Inseli» is located in the middle of the village of Grellingen on the Birs river. In order to give the river more space to expand during floods, the fallow land was revitalized by the Construction and Environmental Protection Directorate of the Canton of Basel-Landschaft. They reinforced river bank structures, dredged water basins, and created groundwater-fed ponds. The result is a wild, hilly landscape patchwork of habitats shaped by piles of branches, stones, and gravel, as well as floodplain vegetation suitable for the river banks. A great benefit for the flora and fauna.

Joint projects of the Birspark Landschaft

Birsuferweg und Birstrail

Birsfelden marks the entrance to the Birspark Landschaft. At the same time, the municipality connects the river area along the Birs with that of the Rhine and thus also with Germany and France. It is an ideal starting point for discovering the cross-border nature, wildlife and

habitats. One of the initial measures taken in 2014 by the participating municipalities was to create a continuous Birsuferweg (trail) connecting Birsfelden and Pfeffingen, that provides information about environmental features and also on human impact on the Birs region. As a further development of the Birsuferweg, the Birspark Landschaft working group has developed two digital environmental trails for families: the Birs-Trail. The interactive puzzle experience takes visitors on a walk through the Birs landscape. Accompanying «Birsi», the kingfisher, along the river, visitors learn all kinds of exciting and educational facts about nature and the animals and plants that live here.

Upgrading zones for public works and facilities

Recently, Birspark Landschaft is focusing on the ecological enhancement of areas around public facilities such as school yards. Native plants, structures like deadwood and stone piles, and other measures are creating diverse habitats for urban wildlife (bees, birds, and lizards). These areas are important «stepping stone biotopes» for connecting habitats with each other. A joint report serves as the basis for implementation. Planning and implementation are co-financed by the Canton of Basel-Landschaft.

Promoting biodiversity and raising awareness among private individuals

In 2023, a connectivity corridor for biodiversity and migration was built along the Birsuferweg, running alongside a highway retaining wall. Various micro structures such as stone piles, deadwood piles, patches of sand, and dry stone walls, provide habitat and are important connecting elements. At the same time, they act as illustrative examples to raise awareness among private individuals about promoting biodiversity in their own gardens. To this end, the brochure «Together for More Biodiversity» was developed, explaining the individual ecological enhancements. The Birstadt website offers further suggestions for personal involvement. Various small structures and their ecological relevance are presented, including detailed information on their creation and maintenance as well as links to regional organizations and experts. In addition to biodiversity, raising awareness of adaptation to climate change is also an important goal.

Birsputzete (cleaning campaign) and neophyte control

Every year, the Birsputzete takes place along the Birs river with the local residents and associations as part of the national Clean-Up Day. In addition to collecting litter, invasive neophytes are also controlled. The Birsputzete is more than just an environmental initiative – it is an invitation to work together across municipal boundaries, make new friends, and experience the Birs region from a different perspective. The activities are spread across a total of eight municipalities.

Joint practical courses

The Birspark Landschaft working group organizes joint practical courses for the further training of maintenance depots and planners and for mutual exchange. In recent years, courses have been held on topics such as hedge management, pond construction and maintenance, the creation of small ecological structures, and the handling of trees.

Climate Adaption

The topic «climate adaptation» is a major concern of all working groups of Birstadt. The Climate Adaptation Concept was developed as a joint, cross-working-group concept (2023/2024).

The concept contains a spatial analysis in its first part: settlement structure types, green spaces, cold-air flows, and the future urban-heat situation. Building on this, three sub-concept plans were developed: urban-heat mitigation, cold-air management, and the bioclimatic relief system (green spaces). In these sub-concept plans, the necessary and possible climate-adaptation measures were mapped – for example, areas with particularly high needs for creating new green spaces in heat-exposed zones.

As another component of the concept, the Birsstadt municipalities agreed on a total of 9 joint short-term projects. Two of these projects are currently being implemented: raising awareness among private landowners regarding micro-climate effective and biodiverse private gardens, and the development of a list of recommended tree species for biodiversity and climate resilience.

14. Outcome

What are the effective and measurable results of the project on the landscape?

The current status of the flagship projects shows what has already been implemented since 2016 and what is still in the planning stage

Birsfelden: Start of the Birs riverside trail > implemented

Muttenz: Schänzli nature and recreation area > in the planning stage (Detailed design)

Münchenstein: Enhancement of Mühlematt and Birsufer > implemented

Reinach: Nature and adventure pond > implemented

Arlesheim: Pocket parks > in the planning stage

Dornach: Enhancement of Aue Birsbogen > in the planning stage

Aesch: Kuhweid groundwater recharge facility > implemented

Grellingen: Revitalization of Inseli > implemented

Awards

Back in 2012, the Birspark Landschaft was named «Landscape of the Year» by the Swiss Landscape Conservation Foundation. Seven years later, the Birspark Landschaft received an award from the International Building Exhibition IBA Basel 2020 (official label), and in 2024, the entire Birsstadt association was awarded the prestigious Wakker-Prize by the Swiss Heritage Society.

IV. RESPECT OF THE CRITERIA OF THE ATTRIBUTION OF THE AWARD

15. Sustainable territorial development

Is the project part of a sustainable development policy?

Does it contribute to the enhancement of environmental, social, economic, cultural or aesthetic values of the landscape? How?

Has it successfully countered or posed a remedy to any pre-existing environmental damage or urban blight? How?

Does it respond to the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss? How?¹

The Birspark Landschaft project is firmly embedded in the political process. Thanks to the representation of administrative and political bodies in the Birspark Landschaft working group, all participating municipalities are closely involved in its implementation. The Birspark Landschaft Action Plan was adopted by all participating municipalities in 2016 and is binding on the authorities. By ensuring that the defined natural areas are not built over, but are ecologically enhanced or renaturalized, the Basel agglomeration can develop in a diverse manner. Aspects and measures related to climate change were also adopted as binding by the authorities in the «Klimaadaptation Birrsstadt» (Birsstadt Climate Adaptation) concept published in 2024.

Enhancing the landscape qualities along the Birs River has greatly contributed to improving citizens' quality of life. The popularity of these recreational areas demonstrates this.

16. Exemplary value

Can the project be considered of exemplary value? Why?

Which are the good practices that it implemented? Which of these practices are considered of exemplary value at the national or transnational level?

The proximity of political and administrative bodies and the links to the cantonal authorities are a major advantage for the implementation of the Birspark Landschafts flagship projects and measures. Healthy competition is developing among the municipalities in the implementation of the planned measures. Over the past few years, this cooperation has been on a voluntary basis and on the initiative of the participating municipalities. The rotation of the leadership of the Birspark Landschaft ensures that all municipalities are committed to the Birspark.

17. Public participation

Does the project actively encourage the public's participation in the decision-making process? How?

Which stakeholders were involved, and how and when were they engaged? When did the active public consultation and dialogue take place, and in what form?

Is the project in line with the wider policies implemented by national, regional or local authorities?

¹ Appendix V to the Reykjavík Declaration

Some of the Birspark Landschafts projects were implemented in the municipalities with public participation procedures. The public is actively involved through campaigns such as the «Birsputzete» (a clean-up campaign along the Birs river) or neophyte campaigns and environmental markets. These campaign days provide an important opportunity for exchange. There is also lively exchange with nature conservation and fishing associations along the Birs.

18. Awareness-raising

Is the project effectively increasing public awareness of the importance of landscape in terms of human development, consolidation of European identity, or individual and collective well-being? How?

Birspark Landschaft regularly reports on the working group's activities and the status of flagship projects and measures in trade magazines, regional and national newspapers, and the municipality's own communication channels. A documentation concept involves photographing the implementation over time so that changes to the area along the Birs can be shown. The Birspark Landschaft has developed into a very important recreational area for the Basel agglomeration. At the same time, however, intelligent visitor management systems also ensures that the diverse fauna and flora find their protected space.

V. ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

Together with the printed version of the Application form, additional material in digital format should be included in one USB key, and returned by post to:

*Secretariat General of the Council of Europe
Directorate General Human Rights and Rule of Law (DG I)
Directorate of Social Rights, Health and Environment
Department for the Reykjavík Process and Environment
Council of Europe Landscape Convention
9th Session of the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe
F-67075 STRASBOURG, Cedex*

- ☒ Text (20 pages max.): *PDF format*
- ☒ Photos (10 max.): *JPEG 350 dpi high definition*
- ☒ Posters (2 max.): *PDF format high definition or JPEG 350 dpi high definition*
- ☒ Video (5 min max.): *mpeg 2 format - It is recommended to present a video (even of amateur quality).*

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