

#### 4. Pilot case – Water management Pilot area: Municipality Puchberg am Schneeberg, State of Lower Austria, Austria

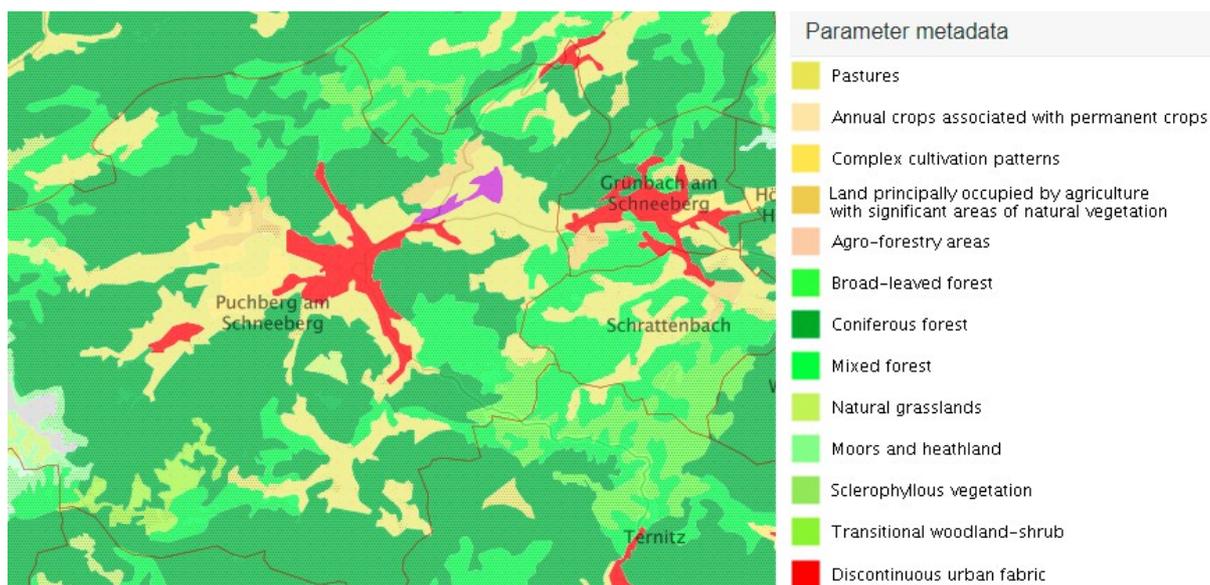
##### The study area

Puchberg am Schneeberg is located in the district of Neunkirchen in southern Lower Austria, within the North-eastern margin of the Alps. The main settlement has an altitude of 585 m above sea level. The highest point of the municipal area is the 2076 m above sea level Klosterwappen, the main peak of the Schneeberg, which is also the highest mountain in Lower Austria. Puchberg has 2694 inhabitants (2020). The municipal area is comparatively sparsely populated, with a population density of 32 inhabitants per square kilometre (by comparison, Lower Austria has 83 and Austria 98 inhabitants per square kilometre). As in many smaller locations in the district of Neunkirchen, over the last thirty years there has been a trend of migration to the surrounding towns and to Vienna.



The municipal area largely consists of meadows, fields and coniferous forests. Five streams rise in the surrounding mountains. The average annual sunshine amount is 1860 hours. Fog is rather rare, in all seasons, and usually lasts only for a very short time. On average, precipitation falls every second day of the year. Even in midsummer rain is not rare. Due to the mountain climate, hot and humid days are very rare even in high summer and at nights the mountain air has a strong cooling effect. In summer, the average temperature is around 25 °C, in winter just below 0 °C. In recent years, there have been signs of more frequent spring drought.

Land use is characterised by agriculture and forestry, in addition to human settlements.



## Pilot area – Graduated grassland management

The pilot area builds on the previous project "Graduated grassland management in Lower Austria, model region Puchberg am Schneeberg", which was supported by the Lower Austrian Funds. The application of the concept of graduated grassland management to the area of Puchberg am Schneeberg was investigated in 2016 and 2017, together with 17 interested grassland farmers of the region. In continuation of this research, a follow-up workshop with farmers was held a few years later, as part of Impuls4Action, to share experiences.

The graduated use of grassland helps farms to improve their ecological and economic situation. The quality of the basic fodder on the farm can be significantly improved by means of fertilisation and frequency of use tailored to the individual areas, thus reducing consumption of concentrated fodder.



Even if some areas are fertilized less and used less frequently, as a result of the gradation of intensity, the total contribution margin can be increased by way of a more intensive use of other areas with good credit rating. However, it should be noted that, especially in the case of intensive meadows, a good balance is achieved between plant stock, fertilisation and timely cutting, in order to achieve high quality. Due to the different qualities of the basic fodder the correct combination of rations is of decisive importance in graded grassland use, in order to achieve added value.