

A Special Relationship Between Humanity and Nature

The Minami Alps Biosphere Reserve

In 2014, the Minami Alps area was recognized as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, fulfilling the requirements for biodiversity conservation, sustainable development, and support for scientific research and education.

UNESCO Biosphere Reserves have three designated zones. The outermost is a transition area, where a variety of human activity occurs and stakeholders work toward the sustainable development of resources. Next is the buffer zone, where the natural environment supports activities such as environmental education and research. At the center is the core area, a zone where the natural environment is protected and preserved.

The Minami Alps are a perfect example of this sustainable relationship between humanity and nature. In the foothills of the mountains are homes, rice paddies, fruit orchards, and other agricultural areas. The buffer zone area is within Minami Alps National Park, and is the setting for ecotourism and educational activities, as well as hiking, birdwatching, and camping. Sustainable logging is still carried out in this zone, although it is strictly controlled so as not to endanger native animals. Finally, the core area is home to a treasure trove of plants and animals, an ecosystem that is actively protected and preserved.

The Biosphere Reserve concept also acknowledges culturally significant activities, such as a traditional fishing method using bamboo traps, and *ikawa mempa*, a bentwood and lacquer craft used to make lunchboxes in the Shizuoka side of the Biosphere Reserve.

The Minami Alps Biosphere Reserve is the acknowledgement of an ongoing process of preserving and cherishing the cultural, historic, and natural elements of this special region.