

EUSALP **ENERGY AWARD** **2026**



Greetings from the EUSALP Presidency 2026



Dear winners of the EUSALP Energy Award 2026,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) is celebrating the 3rd edition of the EUSALP Energy Award.

Under the motto **“Energy Transition in the Alps: From Innovation to Real Impact”** the EUSALP Energy Award 2026 focuses on innovative projects and initiatives that make a tangible contribution to the energy transition in both the power and heating sectors - using technological, organisational, regulatory or market-based solutions.

The energy transition is one of the most significant challenges for the future of the Alpine region. This year's edition shows that the Alpine region and its stakeholders are well prepared for new solutions. All four award winners demonstrate the innovative strength of our Alpine region and symbolize an energy policy that combines economic strength with climate and resource protection in an intelligent and future-oriented way.

I would like to thank all those engaged in this year's EUSALP Energy Award, especially the four award winners and EUSALP Action Group 9, for the excellent work they have done.

Dr. Florian Herrmann, MdL
Minister of State

The EUSALP Energy Award 2026

The decarbonization of the energy sector through solutions that enhance energy efficiency and the roll-out of renewable energy are necessary to mitigate climate change. The EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) has set itself the goal of reducing CO₂ emissions from the energy sector in the Alpine region. The EUSALP Energy Award recognizes best practices that contribute to the energy transition

in the Alpine area thereby facilitating knowledge transfer and the replication of successful initiatives. The 2026 edition was organized under the motto **“Energy Transition in the Alps: From Innovation to real Impact”** honouring stakeholders and their lighthouse projects that lower energy needs and cut CO₂ emissions making them energy transition pioneers in the Alps.

International Jury 2026

Vlasta Krmelj

Energy and Climate Agency
of Podravje, Slovenia

Maximiliane Schmiedmayer

Bavarian Ministry of Economic
Affairs, Regional Development
and Energy, Germany

Silvio De Nigris

Energy Office, Piedmont Region,
Italy

Sandrine Vogel

European Cooperation, Région Sud -
Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur,
France

Sabine Erber

Energy Institute Vorarlberg,
Austria

Livia Behnisch

EUSALP Youth Council,
Switzerland



Leon Schweiger, Co-Founder

With 'Asphalt Goes Green', we have demonstrated that asphalt production can be both carbon-neutral and economically viable using renewable wood dust. Nature Loop Energy is now scaling this unique process to drive the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy across hard-to-decarbonize industries.

Schweiger Straßenbau GmbH / Nature Loop Energy GmbH

Asphalt Goes Green

Bavaria, Germany

Jury verdict

Nature Loop Energy demonstrates how the green industrial transformation can become a reality. By replacing fossil fuels with renewable fuel made from regionally available residual and reclaimed wood, the project "Asphalt Goes Green" reduces CO₂ emissions while creating competitive solutions for a climate-neutral industry. Through the innovative adaptation of existing industrial processes, it provides a scalable and replicable pathway towards reducing the fossil fuel dependency and accelerating the transition to a more sustainable and resilient Alpine economy. The project is a tangible pioneer project in the hard-to-abate sector.

About the project

At its asphalt mixing plant, Schweiger Straßenbau has replaced the fossil-fuel-based process heat system with LignoDust, an innovative technology that uses standardised technical-grade wood dust produced from regional residual and reclaimed wood. The technology replaces approximately 600,000 litres of heating oil and prevents around 1,800 tonnes of fossil CO₂ emissions each year. TÜV-verified measurements show emissions at around 50% below the applicable German limits, while energy costs are approximately 20% lower than those associated with heating oil. Nature Loop Energy is now developing LignoDust into a replicable service model that requires customers to invest in neither their own processing equipment nor additional staff. From spring 2027, the existing production capacity will also supply the first external asphalt plant. Regional logistics networks and modular processing hubs will enable demand-driven expansion across the EUSALP region.

www.nature-loop-energy.de



Source: Mario Nüßbaumer



Source: e5

Renewable Energy Community Vorderwald

Wälderstrom

Vorarlberg, Austria

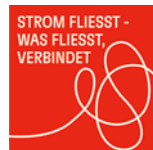
Jury verdict

Wälderstrom demonstrates how regional energy communities can become a driver for social innovation, regional cohesion and climate action. The project combines decentralised renewable energy generation, local electricity sharing, awareness-raising activities and active citizen participation. It demonstrates strong community engagement, tangible regional benefits and proven scalability. The expansion and diversification of renewable generation sources, including photovoltaics and small-scale hydropower, strengthens the resilience and flexibility of the energy community. Wälderstrom promotes behavioural change and the substitution of fossil energy sources by encouraging e-mobility, flexible electricity use, higher self-consumption of solar energy and storage solutions. This makes the energy community a reference model for other Alpine and European regions.

About the project

Wälderstrom is a regional energy community connecting ten municipalities, citizens, businesses, farms, hospitality businesses, cooperatives and a parish. More than 200 members share locally generated electricity, mainly from photovoltaic systems as well as small-scale hydropower. By May 2025, the community's solar generation capacity had doubled from 800 kWp to 1,600 kWp. Clear communication and awareness-raising help members use energy efficiently, adapt consumption to renewable generation and strengthen regional energy independence.

www.waelderstrom.at



Thomas Konrad, Chairman Renewable Energy Community Vorderwald

Energy from the region makes us more independent while strengthening our municipalities at the same time. The Renewable Energy Community Vorderwald demonstrates what becomes possible when we take joint responsibility for our energy future across municipal boundaries. Electricity flows – and what flows connects us.



Source: Gruber Logistics

Gruber Logistics S.p.A.

ZEFES: Zero Emission, Flexible Vehicle Platforms with Modular Powertrains serving the long-haul freight Eco System

South Tyrol, Italy

Jury verdict

The jury recognises 'Zero Emission Flexible Vehicle Platforms (ZEFES)' as an important pilot project for the decarbonisation of the hard-to-abate heavy-duty transport sector. The project addresses one of the most challenging areas of the energy transition by demonstrating innovative zero-emission vehicle technologies under real operating conditions. ZEFES combines a large battery with hydrogen fuel cell technology, thereby significantly increasing vehicle range. The jury highlights the project's strong relevance for sustainable mobility in the Alpine region, its contribution to reducing emissions from freight transport, and its high potential for replication across Europe. By bridging technological innovation and practical application, ZEFES demonstrates how new solutions can support the transition towards a more sustainable and resilient transport system.

About the project

ZEFES is a Horizon Europe project (2023–2026) developing modular battery-electric and fuel-cell platforms for zero-emission heavy-duty transport. Gruber Logistics is testing Italy's first hydrogen fuel cell electric truck under real commercial conditions on the Brenner Corridor. Combining a high-capacity battery with a hydrogen fuel cell range extender, the vehicle offers a range of up to 1,000 km. The six-month pilot evaluates performance, efficiency, commercial feasibility and the supporting hydrogen infrastructure.

www.zefes.eu



Source: Scania Italy

Ettore Gualandi, Manager Sustainability & Eco-innovation

Pioneering the decarbonization of heavy-duty transport, Gruber Logistics is deploying Italy's first hydrogen fuel cell truck along the challenging Brenner Corridor under the EU ZEFES project. This milestone transforms European research into real-world zero-emission freight operations, proving that hydrogen can drive a clean, sustainable future for long-haul logistics.



Source: STEP 73

STEP 73

BatChatO

Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, France

Jury verdict

BatChatO is a forward-looking proposal of a mini pumped-storage hydropower plant, adapting an established technology to the specific challenges of the Alpine energy transition adding additional environmental services and landscape protection measures. Its closed-reservoir concept reduces environmental impacts and demonstrates how energy infrastructure can be better aligned with the high landscape protection requirements in Alpine regions. Beyond long-term energy storage facility, the project provides benefits for wildfire protection and local grid support. It is a promising model for future replicable storage solutions. As the project is still in the development phase, operational validation and quantitative evidence of impacts will be important to demonstrate its sound contribution to the energy transition in the Alps.

About the project

BatChatO is a mini pumped-storage hydropower project developed by STEP 73 in Savoie. Designed as an alternative to grid-connected chemical batteries, it uses two fully enclosed reservoirs in a closed water loop, disconnected from natural watercourses. A 60-centimetre penstock links the reservoirs, while the upper basin provides approximately 10,000 m³ of storage and can also serve as a firefighting water reserve. The facility is designed to store surplus electricity when demand is low and feed it back into the grid during peak periods, covering the peak electricity needs of around 15,000 people. The estimated investment is €19 million, with commissioning currently planned for the end of 2027.



Source: STEP 73

Benoit Badin, STEP 73

STEP 73 is a development company dedicated to offering an alternative to BESS—chemical batteries connected to the grid—by reinventing pumped storage at a small scale with a fully closed water loop disconnected from any natural watercourse. With this project and future replications, STEP 73 intends to provide Europe with a sovereign, low-environmental-impact energy storage solution that is crucial for the transition of our electricity grids.

www.alpine-region.eu



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