

ALPS: NATURE WITHOUT FRONTIERS

THE NEW CONSERVATION FRONTIER

VIENNA 4 – 5 NOVEMBER KICK OFF PROJECT
ECONNECT - RESTORING THE WEB OF LIFE

November 4th and 5th in Vienna will kick off the ambitious international project 'ECONNECT restoring the web of life' funded by the EU in the framework of the Alpine Space Programme aims at establishing an Alps-wide ecological network.

Connecting habitats and protected areas all over the Alps is the new conservation frontier. The project will bring a major and innovative contribution to the conservation of the Alps' outstanding biodiversity. Sixteen partners from six Alpine countries have come together to promote a new methodology for the conservation of the natural heritage of the Alps.

The Alps are one of the most intensively exploited mountain ranges and one of Europe's largest biodiversity pools.

With over 30,000 animal and 13,000 plant species the diversity of life the Alps is simply incredible. 20,000 invertebrates, 200 breeding birds, 80 mammals, 21 amphibians and 15 reptile species 'crowd' the Alps. 417 plant species are endemic, that is they are found only in this region.

Animals and plants need to migrate - even more in times of climate change - between habitats. They cannot halt at state borders or remain in Protected Areas. However, traditionally nature protection in the Alps and elsewhere tends to be site-based. Therefore it has become necessary, especially in the face of global threats such as climate change, to find a new, more dynamic approach. Besides protected areas as core zones it is essential to focus on linking spaces in order to achieve the connectivity of alpine ecosystems: connecting habitats, protected areas, and biodiversity hotspots, thus reducing the fragmentation of populations is now widely seen as the "new frontier" in Alpine nature conservation. On these grounds 16 project partners (5 from Austria, 5 from Italy, 3 from France, 1 from Germany, 1 from Liechtenstein, and 1 from Switzerland) joined their forces to submit a wide-ranging, ambitious, multidisciplinary project to the EU Alpine Space Programme.

The project, named ECONNECT, has become operational in September 2008 and will run until the end of August 2011.

Ecological connectivity will be enhanced by overcoming legal and ecological barriers while considering cross-boundary and super-national needs for action.

In order to achieve a comprehensive ecologic network, it is necessary to harmonise geographical data, to analyse existing physical and legal barriers with a common terminology and methodology with the goal of defining migration corridors at the pan-Alpine level.

The project's emphasis is on the implementation of measures in pilot areas in order to then magnify the results by way of guidelines and best-practice dissemination.

The Econnect partnership comprises regional and national administrations, international NGO's, scientific institutions, and regional implementation partners (national and nature parks). The partners bring complementary competences, and a very long tradition of cooper-

ation. The participation of Alpine countries will ensure that the project will have impact and scope .

Numerous conventions and initiatives emphasise the importance of ecological networks for nature conservation, most notably among them the the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Alpine Convention, both of which were ratified by Alpine countries. As biodiversity is threatened by unsustainable land use, urbanisation, the fragmentation of habitats, and man-made barriers, ecological networks covering the entire Alpine mountain range represent an important contribution to fulfil international commitments.

Project Partners

Lead partner:

University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna; Research Institute of Wildlife Ecology (FIWI) (A)

Other partners:

University of Innsbruck-Institute Ecology (A)

Umweltbundesamt GmbH (A)

National Park Gesäuse GmbH (A)

National Park Höhe Tauern (A)

Italian Ministry of Environment (I)

European Academy of Bolzano (I)

WWF Italy (I)

Parco Naturale Alpi Marittime (I)

Regione Autonoma Valle d'Aosta (I)

Council of Department of Isere (F)

Task Force of Protected Areas (F)

Scientific research centre CEMAGREF (F)

National Park Berchtesgaden (DE)

CIPRA International (LI)

Swiss National Park (CH)

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