

CROSS-COUNTRY ALPINE NETWORK MOVES FORWARD

Top environmental and scientific organisations meet in Switzerland with the aim of unifying the Alpine region under the ECONNECT umbrella project for a coordinated ecological network approach and the protection of biodiversity.

The European project “ECONNECT- Restoring the web of life” has taken significant steps forward and the Alpine-wide network can now be called a reality.

On May 18th, 19th and 20th, sixteen of the most influential scientific, environmental and non-governmental organisations, together with regional and national administrations from Austria, Italy, France, Germany, Liechtenstein and Switzerland; met in Zerneus, Switzerland, to discuss the network's initial phases.

Connecting habitats and protected areas in order to preserve the Alps' extraordinary biodiversity in times of rapid climate change is the aim of this one-of-a-kind project. No frontiers, be they scientific, methodological, statistical or even physical, is the underlying theme of this innovative group of experts.

The **establishment and protection of ecological corridors** is the key issue in facilitating the re-establishment of populations, whether of animals or plants, that have been reduced or eliminated due to climatic changes and human activity. ECONNECT aims to remove physical and legal barriers that have caused significant habitat fragmentation in the Alpine region.

ECONNECT is a three-year project which will run until the end of August 2011. **Seven initial pilot areas have been identified:** the transboundary area Berchtesgaden – Salzburg (D)(A), the French Department Isère(F), the Northern limestone Alps region (D), the Rhaethian Triangle (Engadin/Southtyrol/ Trentino/Tyrol) (CH)(A)(I), the Hohen Tauern region(A), the southwestern Alps- Mercantour/Alpi Marittime(F)(I) and the Monte Rosa region(CH)(I). A **common legal framework** will be drafted by ECONNECT which will allow the areas to work together despite of differing procedures and standards.

The first phase is the **collection of data and its inventory** for proper mapping of common areas and possible corridors, even if located in different jurisdictions. The **study of migration trails** from one area to another will allow the protection and defence of species crossing legal borders between countries.

ECONNECT members will meet again on October 14th in Berchtesgaden, Germany.

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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)

Gesause National Park GmbH (A)

Hohen Tauern National Park(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 Isère (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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