

## **“Future in the Alps” project gets underway**

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## **Europe’s changing climate and the hot summer of 2003**

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## **New publication: “Path to Nature’s Wisdom – Ecological Dialogue Himalaya and Alps”**

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## **Are the Alps fit for the future? “Future in the Alps” project gets underway**

(23.09.2004) At the Alpine Week 2004 in Kranjska Gora, Slovenia, the International Commission for the Protection of the Alps (CIPRA) presented its new project entitled “Future in the Alps”, a broad-based project aimed at promoting sustainable development in the alpine region.

CIPRA intends to use the project to speed up the implementation of sustainable development in the Alps as set forth in the set of international agreements of the Alpine Convention. The “Future in the Alps” project is to run for a period of three and a half years at a cost of around €2.4 million. Its scope of action is the entire Alpine range from Nice in France to Maribor in Slovenia.

The project is aimed at those individuals, businesses and institutions whose everyday work shapes the future of the Alps in one way or another. They are to network in order to exchange know-how and information, gain access to practical knowledge, and obtain support for innovative projects.

The project combines the latest research findings and practical experience, which it evaluates and processes so that it can be used by all interested parties. To disseminate this knowledge, farmers for example are to have the opportunity to attend workshops to discuss ways and means for them to earn a decent living through farming in the Alps in the future. Basic information is to be published in a third Alpine Report. One way in which the know-how might be applied would be to enable tourist enterprises which adopt a sustainable approach to their activities to take part in an “Alpine Enterprise” to be founded as part of the project.

The challenge of the “Future in the Alps” project lies in creating platforms that allow the players involved to strengthen their co-operation beyond the national and language borders of the Alps. The project aims to encourage an interactive exchange in four languages between practice, science, the authorities, NGOs and politics.

The Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research (WSL) is to monitor the project with a scientific approach. Financing is to be provided by the MAVA Foundation for Nature Conservation in Montricher/CH.

Information: [http://www.cipra.org/e/aktivitaeten/zukunft\\_alpen/zukunft\\_alpen.htm](http://www.cipra.org/e/aktivitaeten/zukunft_alpen/zukunft_alpen.htm) (en)

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## Europe's changing climate and the hot summer of 2003

(26.08.2004) Europe's climate has changed considerably over the past one hundred years, and the impact of that change is visible in many areas. An extensive study in English by the European Environment Agency (EEA) shows that Alpine glaciers for instance have lost more than half their ice mass. The study also examined the impact of climate change on mountain flora: it appears that endemic mountain plant species do not adapt to rises in annual average temperatures as well as more competitive shrub and tree species, which are more likely to replace them.

Another study looked at the tangible impact of the hot summer of 2003 (according to EEA experts a further example of Europe's climate change) on Switzerland's waterways. While alpine rivers were swollen by the large volume of melt-water from glaciers, lack of water in the regions of the Jura and the Mittelland and higher water temperatures caused problems for the fish fauna. There were also conflicts of interest between water conservation and agriculture, but not however with regard to the quality of the water and the supply of drinking water. According to the study there is no need at present for immediate action on the part of national legislation.

Sources and information: [http://org.de.eea.eu.int/documents/newsreleases/climate\\_report-en](http://org.de.eea.eu.int/documents/newsreleases/climate_report-en) (en),  
<http://www.umwelt-schweiz.ch/buwal/de/medien/presse/artikel/20040816/01108/index.html> (de)

## Greater co-operation to protect against natural hazards

(23.09.2004) Switzerland, Germany, Austria and Liechtenstein intend to co-operate even more closely to protect against natural hazards in the Alps. This decision was taken by the four German-language Environmental Ministers at this year's meeting in Potsdam/D. The Ministers concurred that natural catastrophes in the Alps were likely to occur more and more often despite all the efforts being made with regard to climate protection. To help prevent and avert natural hazards the four countries are planning to set up a cross-border network comprised of experts, scientists and decision makers among the local authorities.

Given that glaciers in eight out of nine glacier regions of Europe are receding, the Ministers were also agreed that efforts in climate protection itself should be intensified. They appealed to Russia to ratify the Kyoto Protocol so that it could come into force as speedily as possible. There was also unanimous agreement that the development of renewable sources of energy was a key issue. In a further step in climate policy the Environment Ministers agreed to advocate retaining emissions-related landing fees in air traffic.

Source: <http://www.uvek.admin.ch/dokumentation/medienmitteilungen/artikel/20040916/02013/?lang=de> (de)

## The Emmen valley – The vision of a valley heated without oil

(23.09.2004) Timber and solar energy rather than oil, gas and electricity are to be the heating resources of the future in Switzerland's Emmen valley. Although the Emmen valley region is densely forested, each year it still buys in some CHF 30 m's worth of oil, gas and electricity – while more than half the wood accruing each year simply rots away in the region's forests. It's a situation the "Oil of Emmental" project hopes to remedy.

The project aims to invest less in outside energy sources and instead more in wood heating systems, solar installations and energy-saving measures. The region itself would then benefit directly from the money, creating new jobs in building installation practice and in forestry. The locally anchored project is supported by the Canton of Berne and *EnergieSchweiz*.

Computations show that the entire Emmen valley could easily be heated using only timber from the region itself and solar energy, without overexploiting local forests. It would entail simply using only as much timber as the region is capable of re-growing.

Source and information: <http://www.oil-of-emmental.ch> (de)

Pellet manufacturing plant in Schüpbach in the Emmen valley/CH



© <http://www.oil-of-emmental.ch/>

## Ultra-low energy building gains altitude

(09.09.2004) The highest ultra-low energy business premises of the Alps were officially opened in Punt Muragl (Engadine/Switzerland) at the end of August. Gasser Building Materials' 23,000 m<sup>3</sup> warehouse with integrated DIY store is situated at an altitude of 1,728 m above sea level and is heated almost exclusively by solar energy.

The building's heating requirements are more than 90% less than a comparable new building, thanks to the large south-facing glazed area combined with outstanding thermal insulation and the timber and concrete storage mass integrated into the building. A great deal of attention was paid to the building materials used, to ensure that they contained as little "grey energy" as possible; in other words only local timber cut and processed in the region was used in the construction.

Source and information: <http://www.solaragency.org/Solarpreis2000/gasser.htm> (de)

## New publication: "Path to Nature's Wisdom – Ecological Dialogue Himalaya and Alps"

(26.08.2004) The *Naturschutzbund Steiermark/A* has published a German and English conference book following the international conference "Path to Nature's Wisdom – Ecological Dialogue Himalaya and Alps". The conference was held in Graz/A from 9 to 11 October 2002 as part of the UN's International Year of the Mountains 2002, under the patronage of the Dalai Lama.

Guest speakers included scientists, practitioners and politicians as well as spiritual leaders from many different cultural backgrounds. A good third of the contributions dealt with the world views of indigenous peoples and with Asian and Western ethics in an effort to draw lessons on the responsible and judicious use of nature. Other papers addressed the variety of claims to exploitation in the sensitive ecosystems of the Himalaya and the Alps. The third topic area focused on notions of solutions and best practices such as Fritjof Capra's "eco-literacy" and the model of eco-social market economy.

Andrea Loseries-Leick, Franz Horvath (2004): Path to Nature's Wisdom – Ecological Dialogue Himalaya and Alps, ISBN: 3-9501292-1-9, price: € 22.00 plus shipping costs, available through: *Naturschutzbund Steiermark* (publishers) <http://www.naturschutzbund.at/publikationen/allgemein.html> (de/en)

## Landmark NEAT Project under pressure to cut costs

(08.10.2004) According to the Swiss Federal Office for Transport total costs of Switzerland's "New Alps Transversal Route" (NEAT) are likely to be CHF 302 m higher than calculated in the summer, due essentially to geological fault zones, uncertainties about the planned route and costly rail securing techniques.

While funds are still sufficient to finance the NEAT Project until 2008, Parliament already approved an additional loan of CHF 900 m in June. Final costs are now budgeted at around CHF 15.9 bn, although they may well rise by a further CHF 1.3 bn due to the hazard potential. Parliament is expected to decide on an additional loan in 2007.

Construction of the Brenner base tunnel between Austria and Italy is also proving to be more costly and is expected to take longer than originally anticipated. The Austrian Federal Railways (ÖBB) announced that completion of the new railway line through the Lower Inn valley would be delayed by five years to 2013. An expertise had revealed that costs for this section of the line would rise from €1.3 bn to €1.8 bn.

Sources and information: <http://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/dyn/news/schweiz/420991.html> (de) 29.09.2004, [http://tirol.com/innsbruck/artikel\\_20041001\\_301693.html](http://tirol.com/innsbruck/artikel_20041001_301693.html) (de), 01.10.2004, <http://www.newsaktuell.ch/d/story.htx?nr=100480156> (de) 28.09.2004

## Hydrogen-powered piste vehicles in the Alps

(23.09.2004) The Swiss association Swiss Alps 3000 has launched a new campaign aimed at zero-emissions mobility in the Alps. As part of the campaign it presented the prototype of a hydrogen-powered piste vehicle. The first vehicle of this type was tested during winter 2003/2004.

The campaign is targeting conventional diesel-powered piste vehicles, which produce huge amounts of pollutants in mountain regions: More than 1,000 piste vehicles are in operation in the Swiss Alps every season, burning some 10 million litres of diesel and churning out more than 25,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> and around 25,000 kg of the highly toxic soot particulate PM10.

The association itself was founded in February 2003 as part of the UN's Year of the Water. Together with tourism institutions and communities in the Bernese Oberland Swiss Alps wants to promote emission-free mobility in the alpine region by introducing hydrogen as a source fuel. The hydrogen is to be produced using renewable energies such as hydraulic power, wind or solar energy.

Source: <http://www.swissalps3000.ch> (de)

A hydrogen-powered piste vehicle



© <http://www.swissalps3000.ch>

## More protection against GMO crossover

(08.10.2004) The Environment Ministers of Switzerland, Austria, Liechtenstein and Germany have called for genetically modified plants to be regulated by cross-border legislation. At the traditional annual meeting held in Potsdam on 16 September the four Ministers discussed not only ecological and transport policy issues but also how to deal with gene technology in agriculture. Although genetically modified plants are not yet cultivated in the Alpine Region, the four alpine states are eager to adopt joint regulations to protect conventional, gene technology-free, ecological agriculture. Core issues include the potential impact of pollen loading from genetically modified organisms (GMOs) on fields, and also clarifying liability issues. Germany's *Bundestag* has already passed new gene technology legislation, which now has to go through the conciliation committee before it comes into force. The legislation stipulates among others the observance of safety margins and the registration of GMOs in a site register accessible to the public. The GMO neighbour would then be liable if conventionally and/or biologically cultivated fields were to be contaminated.

Sources and information: <http://www.taz.de/pt/2004/09/17/a0090.nf/text> (de) 17.09.2004, <http://www.verbraucherministerium.de/index-000A3940A188102B9E096521C0A8D816.html> (de)

## Miscellaneous

### New competences at the EU for the Alpine Convention

(26.08.2004) As of November a new Commissioner at the European Union is to be officially responsible for the Alpine Convention. Stavros Dimas, currently Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, is to take over as Commissioner for the Environment. Mr Dimas, 63, studied law and economics and worked as a lawyer for both the World Bank and for a Wall Street Law Firm. In Greece he has held the posts of Minister of Agriculture, Minister of Trade and Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology. Nothing is known to date about relations with environmental protection. Margot Wallström currently holds the post of Commissioner for the Environment. The EU is a contracting party to the Alpine Convention alongside the eight countries to the Alpine Region.

Sources: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/commissioners/newcomm\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/commissioners/newcomm_en.htm) (en), Naturschutzbund Deutschland 12.08.2004 [http://www.nabu.de/m06/m06\\_04/02662.html](http://www.nabu.de/m06/m06_04/02662.html) (de)

### King Albert I Memorial Foundation Award

(23.09.2004) For the sixth time now the King Albert I Memorial Foundation presented awards for outstanding achievements in connection with the mountains of the world at Pontresina/CH on 11 September 2004. Among this year's award winners were Peter Rieder, Professor at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich/CH, Michel Guérin, publisher from Chamonix/F, and the Swiss Alpine Museum. Source and information: <http://www.king-albert.ch> (en)

### 2004 Award for Sustainable Tourism: Take part now!

(26.08.2004) The authorities of the *département* of Haute-Savoie/F is presenting an award for the most sustainable tourist project as part of the 6<sup>th</sup> Tourism Summit of Chamonix Mont-Blanc. Projects can be submitted from all over the world until 15 November, provided they focus on the development of tourism compatible with social and environmental issues. The award winner is to be announced at the conference, which is being held from 1 to 3 December; this year's motto is "Opportunities and Risks of International Tourism for Tourism Destinations". The Award, worth EUR 3,000.00, will be handed over at the tourism summit. Source and registration: <http://www.sommets-tourisme.org> (fr/en)

### Environment Award of Switzerland

(09.09.2004) For the fifth time already the Pro Aqua-Pro Vita Foundation is organising its Environment Award of Switzerland. The Award is open to private individuals, companies and institutions from all countries, and the closing deadline is 15 December. The competition is for innovative technologies, processes, concepts or products that contribute to environmental protection and the sustainable use of natural resources. The winner of the Environment Award receives CHF 50,000, and the top three projects are to be presented at a trade fair in May 2005.

Source and information: <http://www.ilmac.ch/ca/i/cus/> (de/fr/en)

## Agenda

**II. International Mountain Research Congress**; 26-28.10.2004, Estoril/P; organisers: Escola Superior de Hotelaria e Turismo do Estoril; Information: <http://www.adenivel.pt/cim2004> (en/fr)

**International Conference on Sustainable Freight Transport in Sensitive Areas**; 27-28.10.2004, Vienna/A; organisers: European Federation for Transport and Environment T&E; Information: <http://www.t-e.nu> (en)

International Seminar: **Spatial Development Governance: Institutional Cooperation Networks**; 28-27.10.2004, Yerevan/Armenia; organisers: Council of Europe; Information: [http://www.udite.org/pdf/20040729\\_Programme\\_Armenia.pdf](http://www.udite.org/pdf/20040729_Programme_Armenia.pdf) (en)

1st European Pond Workshop: **Conservation and Monitoring of Pond Biodiversity**; 28-29.10.2004, Geneva/CH; organisers: University of Applied Sciences of Western Switzerland-EIL-Geneva; Information: [http://www.hesge.ch/eil/actualites/pond\\_workshop.html](http://www.hesge.ch/eil/actualites/pond_workshop.html) (en)

**Himalaya Film Festival**; 06-07.11.2004, Cultural Centre of the Free University of Amsterdam/NL; Information: <http://www.himalayafilmfestival.nl> (en)

**European Conference on Renewable Energies and Cooperation Exchange 2004**; 17-10.11.2004, Vienna/A; organisers: arsenal research and other; Information: <http://www.bit.or.at/energy/> (en/de)

**8<sup>th</sup> Alpine Conference**; 15-17.11.2004, Garmisch-Partenkirchen/D; Information: <http://www.alpenkonvention.org> (de/fr/it/sl)

4<sup>th</sup> European Mountain Convention: **Unlocking the Mountains - A New Approach to Rural Development for Europe's Mountains**; 25-26.11.2004, Rodez/F; organisers: Euromontana; Information: <http://www.euromontana.org> (en/fr)

### Oh!...

... As of 2005 globetrotting skiers will have an opportunity to pursue their favourite sport also in Dubai. By then the Snow World complex will be up and running in the middle of the desert: five slopes with a length of up to 400 m, several lifts, and artificial snowfall several times a day. The €41 m project was designed by Philip Taylor, who is in charge of Disneyland Paris. The Snow World is to be integrated as part of one of the world's largest shopping malls. It is not the only one of its kind: a Snow World was officially inaugurated in the Asian region in January 2004, in the southern Indian town of Hyderabad.

Sources: La Stampa 01.09.2004, [http://www.tourism-watch.de/dt/34dt/34\\_hallen-ski](http://www.tourism-watch.de/dt/34dt/34_hallen-ski) (de), <http://www.natives.co.uk/places/snowdomes.htm> (en)