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The Environment Ministers of the alpine countries could not agree on a successor to the interim Secretary General, Noël Lebel. The candidate supported by the majority was vetoed by two states. On the subject of population and culture the ministers resolved merely to draw up a declaration rather than a legally binding implementing protocol. This means that population issues are still not handled on the same level as such topic areas as the environment and industry, with so far nine legally binding protocols for the implementation of the Alpine Convention. As a result guaranteeing the provision of local services in rural regions is neglected in the Alpine Convention in much the same way as for instance good training and further training opportunities or the furtherance of regional architecture.

By contrast the meeting did for the first time adopt a plan of action for the Alpine Convention over several years, focusing on targets for activities over the next few years. On the transport issue the Environment Ministers of the alpine states and a representative of the European Commission issued a declaration under which external costs of HGV traffic are also to be charged. In addition toll revenue should now also be earmarked to fund rail infrastructure, too. Nearly all the ministers present voiced their concerns about climate change in their presentations and its repercussions on the Alps. Germany officially handed over the Chair to the Alpine Convention to Austria.

Source and information: <http://www.cipra.org> (de/fr/it/sl/en)

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## New publications show: biodiversity still on the wane

(04.11.2004) The "Biodiversität in der Schweiz" (Biodiversity in Switzerland) study published by the Biodiversity Forum Switzerland has concluded that genetic diversity and biodiversity are more at risk in Switzerland than in most other European countries. In the study renowned scientists highlight striking shortcomings in efforts to protect biodiversity and suggest a number of solutions. They call for improved outline conditions from political sources and appeal for a sustainable approach to biological diversity. The study cites a number of factors for the dwindling wealth of species: intensive farming, the overflow of towns into the countryside and the unplanned settlement of natural environments, and also climate change. With its easily accessible, popular-science style the study is aimed intentionally at the general public. The 237 page book contains many photographs and illustrations showcasing the many facets of nature in Switzerland.

The dwindling wealth of species is also a cause for concern in Germany. The new practical guide in English issued by the German Federal Environmental Agency, entitled "Integration of Biodiversity Concerns in Climate Change Mitigation Activities", is designed to help prevent measures which may protect the climate yet threaten biodiversity; for example afforestation with fast-growing, non-indigenous species of trees.

Sources and information: Baur, B. et al. (2004): Biodiversität in der Schweiz – Zustand, Erhaltung, Zukunft. Bern: Haupt Verlag (de), <http://www.umweltdaten.de/medien-e/biodiv.pdf> (en)

## Deregulation of public services accentuates regional polarisation in Switzerland's alpine regions

(02.12.2004) A new study by the Swiss National Research Programme NFP 48 entitled *Landscapes and Habitats of the Alps* has shown that the deregulation of public services has accentuated inequalities between centres and peripheries in alpine regions. A survey of 1,385 companies in Switzerland's mountain cantons has revealed that businesses in peripheral regions feel disadvantaged by the increased market orientation of post office, telecommunications, public transport and electricity, and have noted direct negative consequences. By contrast businesses at the centre of mountain regions feel virtually no drawbacks due to their location. What's more, by virtue of the demand power they command, large companies tend to be more favourable towards deregulation than small and medium-sized companies. While most businesses see advantages in the deregulation process when it comes to telecommunications, the opening-up of the post office market in particular is viewed with a critical eye.

Mountain cantons face a dual challenge. On the one hand they feel that optimum links between centres in mountain regions and centres in Switzerland as a whole need to be guaranteed. And on the other they believe that more attention needs to be paid to the development of peripheral regions. A strategy with regionally defined objectives would help to overcome this challenge.

Source and information: [http://www.nfp48.ch/projekte/projects\\_detail.gp?id=90&nfpnum=30](http://www.nfp48.ch/projekte/projects_detail.gp?id=90&nfpnum=30) (de); Thierstein, A. (2004) Liberalisierung öffentlicher Dienstleistungen. Bern (de)

A postal bus in a mountain region.



© <http://www.postauto.ch>

## Who's picking up the bill? New study on external transport costs in Germany and Europe

(04.11.2004) A study published in early October on the external costs of transport in the EU, Switzerland and Norway by the research institutes IWW (Karlsruhe/D) and Infras (Zurich/CH) shows that the transport system in Germany causes some €150 bn in health and environmental costs each year. The costs for health and environmental damage caused by transport are not covered by those responsible; instead they are borne by the public in general, for instance through social security contributions and taxes. Road traffic is the single most responsible factor for driving up these costs: 83% of health and environmental costs are due to road traffic, with air traffic and rail traffic accounting for 14% and 2% respectively. For Switzerland in particular a new study on commuter traffic shows that more and more people are using their cars to travel to work.

Sources and information: Infras (26.10.2004) <http://www.infras.ch> (de/fr/en); Frick, R. (2004): Pendlermobilität in der Schweiz. Neuchâtel (de)

## As free as a bird? Light pollution a hazard for migratory birds

(04.11.2004) More and more migratory birds are falling prey to night-time lighting conditions as they fly south. A closed cover of low-lying fog such as the one that prevailed over large areas of Switzerland in mid-October seriously disrupts the migratory birds' ability to orientate themselves; combined with towns and villages that are brightly lit at night it can represent a death trap for the birds. Migratory birds then orientate themselves according to artificial sources of light and either collide with tall buildings or are unable to find their way back out of the "light dome" lying over the towns. They fly around for hours at random and suffer stress before finally falling to the ground with exhaustion and dying. According to the Swiss Bird Observatory at Sempach, reducing the lighting in towns and villages on foggy nights could significantly reduce the risk posed to migratory birds.

Source and information: <http://www.vogelwarte.ch/home.php?lang=d&cap=aktuell&subcap=news&tid=aktuell> (de)

## Mount Everest put forward for UNESCO World Heritage in Danger List

(02.12.2004) The Mount Everest region is at risk from global warming and should therefore be included on the UNESCO's *World Heritage in Danger List*. Mountaineers and representatives of the environmental group Friends of the Earth submitted a petition to the UNESCO Committee at the end of November. New studies at the Sagarmatha National Park have shown that ice and glaciers around the world's highest mountain are melting faster and faster. One consequence has been the formation of large glacier lakes, which pose a threat to the people living in the valleys below. What's more the constant melt may well disrupt the region's entire water household in the long term. If the region were to be included on the list, UNESCO member states would be obliged to combat the cause of the threat – climate change – and reduce greenhouse gases. However as with the Kyoto Agreement the same applies here: nation states cannot be forced to act. It would however be the first time that a region is included on the list because it is threatened by climate change.

Sources and information: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/4018261.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4018261.stm) (en), <http://whc.unesco.org/pg.cfm?cid=86> (en)

## Glaciers melting faster than anticipated

(18.11.2004) A new study by Zurich University using satellite images to analyse the surface area of 930 glaciers has shown that Switzerland's glaciers lost around 18% of their surface area between 1985 and 2000. By comparison glaciers had receded by only 1% over the period 1973 to 1985. Projections for the entire alpine region even show a total loss of 22% between 1985 and 2000, which means that glacier shrinkage is now already on a scale originally not anticipated until another twenty years' time.

Smaller glaciers have been particularly affected by the shrinkage. So far these glaciers had not appeared in the inventory lists of the glacier report published annually, which only takes account of the length data of 120 larger glaciers. Researchers were able for the first time to analyse by automated means data provided by the Landsat satellite using modern methods of digital image processing and geo-informatics. For the past 20 years the satellite has been flying over parts of the alpine region every 16 days, recording a strip of land 185 km in width.

Source and information: <http://www.dissertationen.unizh.ch/2004/paul/abstract.html> (de/en)

The tongue of the Morteratsch Glacier/CH has been melting steadily.



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## Storm Lothar not an ecological disaster

(18.11.2004) Storm damage does not pose a threat to the long-term conservation of Switzerland's forests; rather it contributes to forest renewal and promotes biodiversity. These are the findings of a study by the Swiss Agency for the Environment, Forests and Landscapes (SAEFL) on the storm nicknamed Lothar, which swept across Switzerland and her neighbouring states on 26 December 1999. The storm was not a disaster, either ecologically or economically.

Despite the storm damage forests were able to exercise their protective function over part of the affected areas, and in most places their regenerative ability remained good. The SAEFL recommends that near-natural (mixed) forests be promoted to ensure that in future Switzerland's forests are better able to withstand the impact of storms. Measures following a storm must focus first and foremost on the forests' protective function, particularly in areas where the risk of consequential damage (mainly due to the bark beetle) is intolerable or where people or materials assets are directly at risk from natural hazards. From an economic and ecological point of view it is also advisable to leave most of the wood brought down by a storm on the ground as even fallen trees have a protective function.

RAETZ Philippe 2004: Erkenntnisse aus der Sturmschadenbewältigung. Synthese des Lothar-Grundlagenprogramms. Schriftenreihe Umwelt Nr. 367. Publication of the Swiss Agency for the Environment, Forests and Landscapes (SAEFL), Bern

## From vegetable plots to supermarkets: land consumption in France

(02.12.2004) The French association for regional planning and rural development has recently published a white paper on the subject of land consumption as a result of urbanisation, entitled "The End of the Landscape?". More and more arable land is being built up with residential buildings and industrial parks, and land consumption is progressing at an alarming pace.

This trend is particularly noticeable in tourist resorts in mountain areas. In the *Haute Savoie* for instance competition for land has taken on threatening dimensions. Each year some 7,000 people move to the region, resulting in land consumption of 500 m<sup>2</sup> for each new inhabitant and 500 hectares for development measures. If this trend is allowed to continue at this pace, the Arve valley for example will be entirely built up within ten years. The association wants to use general proposals for improvement to launch a discussion of this issue and influence a bill by the French government relating to a reform of agriculture and land allocation.

Source: [http://www.safer.fr/6-actualite/conf\\_livreblanc\\_12102004.htm](http://www.safer.fr/6-actualite/conf_livreblanc_12102004.htm) (fr)



## Miscellaneous

### International Mountain Day focuses on conflict resolution

(04.11.2004) December 11 is to be celebrated worldwide as International Mountain Day. This year the main focus of interest is the overriding significance of peace for sustainable development; indeed mountain regions are today often among the poorest, least developed regions of the world, and suffer disproportionately often from conflicts and violent confrontations. Any improvement in living conditions of mountain populations is not possible without progress in conflict management and resolution.

Source and information: <http://www.mountainpartnership.org/imd/imd.htm> (en/fr/es)

### Certification system for sustainable hotel establishments

(18.11.2004) The Ibex Label is to be used to certify Swiss hotel establishments which excel through particularly sustainable and social management. Depending on achievements one to five of these Ibexes are to be awarded by the Association for Economy, Ecology and Society. Businesses interested in obtaining certification can put themselves to the test in advance, online, to see to what extent their establishment satisfies the Label criteria and where any shortcomings might lie. The ratings categories include Management, Ecology, Regional Affairs and Transport, Social Affairs and Finance, and Economic Affairs.

Source and information: <http://www.oe-plus.ch> (de)

### Mountains in the Mediterranean Region Project presented at the IUCN Congress

(02.12.2004) Italy's Environment Minister presented the Mountains in the Mediterranean Region Project at the IUCN Congress held in Bangkok from 17 to 25 November. The Congress focused not just on the APE (Apennine Parks of Europe) pilot project, which promotes sustainable development in the Apennine regions, but also on trans-border co-operation in the western Alps. The Mountains in the Mediterranean Region Project is supported by the Italian Ministry of the Environment and the environmental protection agencies *Federparchi* and *Legambiente*.

Source and information: <http://www.parks.it/federparchi> (it)

### Artificial high water affects ecology of running water

(02.12.2004) A new WWF study shows that the artificial high-water (surges) and low-water (sinks) caused daily by hydraulic power plants are having disastrous repercussions on the ecosystem of running water. Firstly living organisms and creatures are flushed away whenever water levels surge or are left dry when water levels recede. Secondly the entire river floor is clogged up and solidified by fine material, with a severe impact on the river bottom as a habitat. 16 of the 17 fish species remaining in the Alpenrhein are now at risk.

Source and information: [http://www.wwf.ch/wwfdata/media/de/studie\\_schwallsunk.doc](http://www.wwf.ch/wwfdata/media/de/studie_schwallsunk.doc) (de)

## Agenda

International Convention: **National Strategy for Sustainable Mountain Development – An Integrated Approach**; 13-14.12.2004, Teheran/Iran; convention language: English; organisers: Mountain Environment Protection Society (MEPS);

Information: <http://www.fao.org/countryprofiles/index.asp?lang=en&iso3=IRN&subj=5> (en)

International Conference: **Education for Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions**; 18-20.01.2005, Ahmedabad/India; conference language: English; organisers: Centre for Environment Education in Ahmedabad;

Information: <http://www.ceeindia.org/esf> (en) und <http://www.ceehimalaya.org> (en)

International Conference: **Biodiversity: Science and Governance**; 24-28.01.2005, Paris/F; conference languages: English and French; organisers: UNESCO;

Information: <http://www.recherche.gouv.fr/biodiv2005paris> (fr/en)

Workshop: **Remote Sensing of Snow and Glaciers: Important Water Resources of the Future**; 21-23.02.2005, Berne/CH; workshop language: English; organisers: European Association of Remote Sensing Laboratories (EARSel);

Information: <http://dude.uibk.ac.at/lissig/Conferences/Berne2005/index.html> (en)

**The 53<sup>rd</sup> International Film Festival of Mountains, Exploration and Adventure "Città di Trento"** entitled "Arctic & Antarctic – North Pole & South Pole"; 30.04.-8.05.2005, Trento/I;

Information: <http://www.trentofestival.it> (en/it)

### Oh!...

... If everything goes to plan and according to the calculations of Austrian Muhammad Müller, a new tunnel link between Austria and Slovenia is scheduled for completion around the year 7600. In fact the ground-breaking ceremony has already taken place. Equipped with a spade each, Müller and a friend began digging away in early November on the tunnel which they hope will one day connect the Austrian town of Graz and the Slovene town of Slovenj Gradec some 42 miles away. To complete the tunnel project Müller & Co. will have to keep digging for around 5600 years. Müller, who converted to Islam, wants to use the project to draw attention to the issues of religion and unemployment.

Source: *Liechtensteiner Volksblatt*, 08.11.2004