

Austria in Bid for Alpine Convention Water Protocol

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Putting an end to terminology confusion in the alpine region

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Austria in Bid for Alpine Convention Water Protocol

(24.03.2005) The main areas of focus of Austria's chairmanship of the Alpine Convention have now been defined. At a press conference held in Innsbruck/A on 18 March Environment Minister Josef Pröll outlined Austria's programme. According to Mr Pröll Austria is to focus on adopting a Water Protocol, addressing transport issues and completing the Progress Report on the state of the Alps. Austria is to chair the Alpine Convention for the next two years.

Mr Pröll referred to the immanent significance of the entire Alpine arc for Europe's hydrological household and to the problems of the many different claims to exploitation. He added that although the EU's Framework Directive on Water Policy was an important instrument for cross-border water protection, not all the contracting parties to the Alpine Convention were also members of the EU. "Here we see the need to provide a legal framework also under the aegis of the Alpine Convention, which is why we shall move quickly to make a start on the preliminary work," said Mr Pröll. With this initiative Austria is responding to demands which both CIPRA and various environmental groups have been raising for many years.

Austria also wants to capitalise on its double presidency of both the Alpine Convention and the EU in the coming year to raise the issue of a sustainable and economically viable transport trend in the alpine region at the international level. It is to focus its attention not just on transit traffic but also traffic within the Alps and external-internal tourist traffic. In this connection Environment Minister Pröll announced that an international expert conference would be held in Austria in January 2006.

Finally he added that work on the Progress Report on the Alps was also to be completed under Austria's chairmanship. The Minister is particularly interested in obtaining a clear documentation of the damage that has already become noticeable in the Alps as a consequence of climate change.

Source: <http://minister.lebensministerium.at/article/articleview/31064> (de)

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Network of forestry experts for the alpine region

(24.02.2005) On 16 February representatives of 19 forestry agencies from seven alpine countries launched the Interreg IIIB Project "KnowForAlp" in Vaduz/FL. KnowForAlp is an alpine-wide network for forest owners and foresters whose aim is to enable a comprehensive exchange and transfer of know-how. Besides 400 scientists the network of experts comprises numerous user groups so that the interests of forest owners, forest rangers and groups interested in forestry can be incorporated into the know-how transfer.

At the heart of the KnowForAlp initiative is the internet-based communication platform www.waldwissen.net, featuring specialist knowledge and topical information in several languages on the subject of forest management. The initiative also aims jointly to develop and implement transnational training and further training programmes and consultancy services. The waldwissen.net initiators see the project merely as the start of a much greater development, and hope that other interested parties even beyond the alpine region will also want to play an active part in waldwissen.net. Their prime concern is to expand the internet portal into a pan-European information and communication headquarters for forestry.

Source and information: Bayerische Landesanstalt für Wald- und Forstwirtschaft; <http://www.waldwissen.net> (de/fr/it/sl/en)

The Alps as a wellness region – New EU project

(24.03.2005) January 2005 saw the launch of the Alpshealthcomp Project aimed at strengthening the competitiveness of the alpine region as a health and wellness destination. The partners of Alpshealthcomp, a project of the EU Community Initiative Interreg IIIB Alpine Space Programme, come from Italy, Austria and Germany, the project itself being endowed with around one million euros.

The three-year programme is to focus on, among other aspects, research into alpine-specific medical effects, the quality management of alpine wellness and health package offers, and initiatives in cross-national training and further training. Particular attention is to be paid to such natural resources as altitude, water, moors, medicinal herbs, whey, hay, apple extracts, etc., in striving to establish scientifically the health impact of typically alpine health offers. Initial results from the project are expected in the course of 2006.

Source and information: <http://www.tourismuspresse.at/detail.html?id=260064&lang=de> (de), <http://www.alpinespace.org> (de/fr/it/sl/en)

New EU project: AlpNaTour

(07.04.2005) The Interreg IIIB AlpNaTour Project has been up and running since the start of this year. The Project focuses on practical ways of integrating recreation and tourism concerns in management planning processes of Natura 2000 sites. The Project is to provide a guideline and checklists for the management of Natura 2000 sites influenced by the economic interests of tourism and recreation.

The survey is based on a comparison of management planning tools in Natura 2000 sites in Austria, Germany, Italy and Slovenia. Methods for measuring and modelling tourist development will then be drawn up and suitable cooperative planning instruments selected. The compilation of checklists and guidelines will be preceded by a verification of the methods and instruments themselves at various Natura 2000 sites in the countries concerned.

The AlpNaTour Project has a term of two years and involves partners from Austria, Germany, Italy and Slovenia.

Source and information: <http://www.alpnatour.info> (en), <http://www.alpinespace.org> (de/fr/it/sl/en)



Japan: Many skiing regions on verge of bankruptcy

(07.04.2005) Japan's winter resorts are in crisis. Since the boom years in the early 1990s the number of winter sports enthusiasts has dropped by more than a third. Even on weekends where snow is abundant many of the lifts remain closed. One ski resort in two is on the verge of bankruptcy. And yet in recent years only 4 out of a total of 722 ski areas have closed down; this is because Japanese legislation requires that, in the event of closure, operators dismantle the lift facilities and restore the ski slopes.

The current malaise is due to vast overcapacities, which have triggered a collapse in prices. Today the lift operators and hoteliers lack the funds necessary for new and replacement investments, with negative repercussions on competitiveness. Japan's winter resorts are hoping the situation might be alleviated by tapping the booming markets in South Korea and China.

Source and information: <http://www.iht.com/articles/2005/03/18/news/ski.html> (en)

Putting an end to terminology confusion in the alpine region

(07.04.2005) The LexAlp project was recently launched in a bid to harmonise the legal language used in environmental and regional planning in alpine countries. As the first project of its kind LexAlp covers all four official languages of the Alps – French, German, Italian and Slovene. A lexicon is to be compiled in these four languages so that agreement can be reached on the legal and administrative terminology to be used at the supranational level from the legal systems of the six countries involved, namely Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia and Switzerland.

Organisations involved with the development of the alpine region, among them the Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention, have long been calling for a common, clearly defined legal usage. In future terminological confusion such as with the term “environmental risk assessment”, which is used in three different ways in Italian protocol versions, should no longer occur. The LexALP project is planned over a term of three years (2005-2007) and is financed in the context of the Interreg IIIB Alpine Space Project.

Sources and information: http://www.eurac.edu/Org/LanguageLaw/Multilingualism/Projects/lexalp_general (en); ACADEMIA – The Science Magazine of the European Academy of Bolzano, No. 37, March 2005.

Environmental risk assessment partly abolished in Austria

(10.03.2005) On March 2 Austria's Lower House of Parliament, the National Council, adopted a number of key changes to the statutory basis of environmental risk assessments. Under the amendment mandatory environmental risk assessments have been waived for specific projects (construction of or modifications to leisure and recreation parks, sports stadiums, etc.).

In such cases the assessment is to be replaced by a shorter assessment involving a limited participation procedure, on the basis of which the provincial government concerned can then determine whether an environmental risk assessment should be conducted. If so, the environmental risk assessment is carried out merely in a simplified process. Unlike the traditional environmental risk assessment procedure it does not allow citizens' action committees and environmental organisations any opportunity to submit their objections; only the communities concerned and immediate neighbours are entitled to raise objections. An alliance of Austrian environmental associations has instituted appellate proceedings against Austria before the European Commission, claiming infringement of applicable EU law, which among others stipulates the participation of the general public in every environmental procedure.

Sources and information: http://www.parlament.gv.at/portal/page?_pageid=908,844043&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL (de), http://www.umweltdachverband.at/service/presse/uvp_020305.doc (de)

Turin Winter Olympics 2006: Government to fill financial gap

(10.03.2005) Less than one year before the start of the 2006 Winter Olympics uncertainty still prevails as to how to fill the financial gap of around €180 m that has resulted from a lack of revenue. Moreover the internal disputes within the Games' Organising Committee that have now been going on for several months have reached a new high with the forced resignations of both the Chairman and his deputy.

To fill the financial gap the government, with the agreement of the local authorities, would like to fall back on public sponsors without infringing EU law, which prohibits state subsidies. Specifically a treasury company by the name of Torino Evolution is to come to the rescue, the company itself being 51% controlled by the public agency for investment matters Sviluppo Italia and 49% by the Region of Piedmont, and the Province and City of Turin. The government has already pledged €80 m; a further €100 m must now be raised (to be provided by the inter-ministerial committee for economic affairs) – and the budget for the Games approved.

Source: CIPRA-Italia



New Master of Science Programme on the Management of Protected Areas

(24.03.2005) The University of Klagenfurt/A has created a new study programme on the subject of the Management of Protected Areas. The two-year course in English is to be launched in September 2005. While the first semester focuses on theoretical and scientific foundations, the second and third semesters look at practical aspects of the management of protected areas. During the final semester students are to work on concrete projects, either applied or purely scientific. Besides the nine course modules the curriculum available to students also includes intensive e-learning units. The requirements for application for the Master of Science programme include a university degree or equivalent.

Information: <http://www.mpa.uni-klu.ac.at/index.php/plain/home> (en)

Miscellaneous

State subsidies for regional products compatible with EU law

(10.03.2005) Buying products from the region strengthens regional economic cycles and is kinder on the climate. However there has been some debate within the EU whether the subsidising of regional products by members state governments actually obstructed the European single market. A study commissioned by Germany's Federal Environmental Agency entitled "State Aid for Regional Products – A Legal Analysis" now shows that it is possible to subsidise regional products without affecting free competition within Europe.

The study can be downloaded in English and in German free of charge at: <http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/uba-info-medien/index.htm>.

Source: Umweltbundesamt Berlin, 10.11.2004, <http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/uba-info-presse/2004/pd04-106.htm> (de)

Mistletoe area boundaries on the ascendant

(24.02.2005) Scientists at the Swiss Federal Institute for Forest Snow and Landscape Research have found specimens of mistletoe at altitudes of up to 1500 m. It was previously thought that in Switzerland mistletoe grew only in areas below 1000 m above sea level. Comparisons by the scientists have shown that over the past 100 years the area boundaries of mistletoe have shifted upwards by at least 250 m. They are assuming that this is a direct consequence of climate change.

Source: http://www.wsl.ch/media/050209_misteln-de.ehtml (de/fr)

Rolex rewards the spirit of enterprise

(07.04.2004) The Rolex Awards are for outstanding initiatives in relation with the environment, cultural heritage, science and medicine, technology and innovation as well as research and discovery. Individuals from all over the world are eligible to submit planned or partly implemented projects. The winners must use the prize money, worth half a million US dollars in 2006, to implement their projects. Projects from Europe can be submitted up until 30 September 2005.

Information: <http://www.rolexawards.com> (en)

Agenda

4th International Conference on Business and Sustainable Performance: **Does Business need Partnerships?**; 14 – 15 April 2005, Aalborg, Denmark; conference language: English; organisers: Euro Sustainability 2005, Aalborg Kongres & Kultur Center;

Information: <http://www.euro-environment.dk> (en)

II International Seminar on Mountain Tourism: **Mountain Huts – Challenges for Tourists and Nature**; 14 – 17 April 2005, Szklarska Poręba, Poland; conference languages: German, English; organisers: Friends of Nature International;

Information: <http://www.nfi.at> (de/en)

International Conference: **Multifunctionality of Landscapes - Analysis, Evaluation and Decision Support**; 18 – 19 May 2005, Giessen, Germany; conference language: English; organisers: Collaborative Research Centre SFB 299;

Information: <http://www.sfb299.de> (en)

International Conference: **Our Shared Landscape – Integrating ecological, socio-economic and aesthetic aspects in landscape planning and management**; 2 – 6 May 2005, Ascona, Switzerland; conference language: English; organisers: Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, ETH Zurich;

Information: <http://osl.ethz.ch> (en)

13th International Annual Conference and General Assembly of the Climate Alliance: **Prospects with Kyoto**; 24 – 25 May 2005, Luxembourg; conference languages: French, German, English; organisers: Climate Alliance;

Information: <http://www.klimabuendnis.org/download/mv2005-programm-en.pdf> (en)

International Seminar on Spatial Planning: **ESPON YoungStars Seminar Create Europe**; 30 – 31 May 2005, Ljubljana, Slovenia; conference language: English; organisers: European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON);

Information: <http://www.bbr.bund.de/index.html?/raumordnung/europa/espon/youngstars.htm> (en)

Oh!...

... Wrapping up glaciers: it's an idea that comes from Austria and which the Swiss have put into practice. Ski resorts want to protect glaciers developed for the purposes of tourism from melting, and are experimenting with different cover methods. A start is being made by the Andermatt/CH mountain railways, who want to cover around 3,000 m² of the Gurschen Glacier at the beginning of May. The high-tech film consists of PVC foam, costs around €20 per m², and reflects a large part of the incident radiation. In Austria a number of ski resorts even want to protect their glaciers on a large scale in future, in the belief that it is better to spend lots of money on fighting symptoms rather than deploying genuine climate protection measures.

Source:

<http://www.sonntagszeitung.ch/dyn/news/nachrichten/480372.html> (de)