

## Alpine Convention's implementation monitoring inadequate

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## EU research project on water resources: monitoring and forecasting

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## International Mountain Day 2005

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(20.10.2005) This year for the first time (and every four years thereafter) the Contracting Parties to the Alpine Convention are to give an account as to whether and to what extent they have met their obligations under the terms of the Convention and its Implementing Protocols. Several Contracting Parties have failed to submit their reports on time or in all the Convention's languages. At the meeting of the Board of Review held in Vienna/A from 17 to 19 October, the International Commission for the Protection of the Alps (CIPRA) criticised that serious preparations for the meeting had been hampered as a result. The Principality of Monaco has so far dispensed entirely with submitting a report, even though the deadline expired as far back as the end of August.

According to a resolution of the Ministers of the Environment the reports are to be made public, yet so far this has not been done either, although this is to be rectified soon. Given the abundance of paperwork and the short preparation time it was not possible to discuss the details of the reports at the Vienna meeting. What did emerge, however, is that there were relatively few problems involved in completing the extensive questionnaires. Only Austria and Slovenia called in a non-governmental organisation (NGO) to draw up the report, with several states indicating that they had given NGOs the opportunity to participate in principle.

In CIPRA's view, reporting on the observance of Alpine Convention commitments gives the alpine states and the EU the opportunity every four years to show what they have achieved. At the same time any shortcomings in the implementation are to be discussed as openly as possible and ways of remedying them are to be examined. Such shortcomings are seen for instance in the fact that only Austria and Slovenia are known to have had court rulings and decisions taken by the authorities founded explicitly on the Alpine Convention and its Protocols.

The reports are to be discussed in detail at a further meeting in mid-December, with the Alpine Convention's Permanent Secretariat taking charge of the preliminary work.

Source: CIPRA-International

## Contents

Alpine Convention's implementation monitoring inadequate.....	1
EU research project on water resources: monitoring and forecasting .....	2
International conference on cross-alpine traffic .....	2
Alpine summit flora undergoing rapid change. ....	2
Platform for natural hazard management.....	2
International Mountain Day 2005 .....	3
Alpine landscape too bright at night.....	3
New issue of the <i>Journal of Alpine Research</i> series....	3
Swiss Bird Index tracks Alpine birds.....	3
Miscellaneous.....	4
Agenda .....	4
Oh!.....	4

## EU research project on water resources: monitoring and forecasting

(06.10.2005) The main aim of the recently launched AWARE project (Available Water Resources in Mountain Environments) is to provide tools for monitoring and forecasting water availability and distribution in those drainage basins where snowmelt is a major component of the annual water balance in Alpine catchments. The project will develop models to represent snow-pack dynamics and snowmelt runoff. The models are designed expressly to integrate earth observation data and in-situ hydrological and meteorological measurements. They will be implemented in an interactive online system that allows users (hydropower companies, municipal water supply companies, etc.) to apply the models to a local catchment area.

AWARE is being promoted by the EU Commission as part of the sixth framework programme (FP6). Partners in the project include research institutes, university and private-sector companies from Italy, Austria, Switzerland, Slovenia and Spain.

Source and information: <http://www.gmes.info/98+M5c4c33309aa.0.html?idproj=45&page=0&what=1> (en)

Research focuses on water cycles in mountain regions.



© <http://wa.slf.ch>

## International conference on cross-alpine traffic

(03.11.2005) The international "Transport Across the Alps" conference is to be held in Lucerne/CH from 1 to 3 December. Key issues to be addressed at the conference include the impact of road traffic along the main alpine thoroughfares, the influence of statutory and political provisions on transit traffic and the interactions between transport, regional development, tourism, the environment and the economy. Papers and discussions will examine the situation of transport in the Alps, trends and research findings.

An excursion to the building site of the Gotthard base tunnel in Amsteg, one of the biggest transport projects in the alpine region, is also scheduled for December 3. The conference languages are Italian, German and French (simultaneous interpreting provided).

For information and registration visit <http://www.monitraf.org/24d542.html> (en)

## Alpine summit flora undergoing rapid change

(03.11.2005) As part of their study on the "Influence of Climate Change on Succession Processes and Population Dynamics of Vegetation in Alpine Environments" research teams at the universities of Hanover/D and Zurich/CH have concluded that the rate of change in the floristic composition of vegetation in the Swiss Alps is increasing all the time. According to the experts this trend is consistent with global climate change.

The study showed that the number of species on the ten high mountain summits of the Bernina Massif/CH has doubled and even tripled over the past century. The rate of change of the summit flora over the last twenty years is almost three times higher than that of the first eight decades of last century. It proves that plants are clearly reacting to the climate changes of the 1990s, the warmest decade since meteorological records began.

Information: [http://www.mediadesk.unizh.ch/mitteilung.php?text\\_id=48&grp=aktuell](http://www.mediadesk.unizh.ch/mitteilung.php?text_id=48&grp=aktuell) (de). Bibliography: Walther, G.-R., Beissner, S., Burga, C. A. (October 2005): Trends in the upward shift of alpine plants. In: "Journal of Vegetation Science" 16/5, pages 541-548. Download: <http://www.bioone.org/bioone/?request=get-toc&issn=1100-9233&volume=016&issue=05> (en)

## Platform for natural hazard management

(17.11.2005) NAHRIS, the first Swiss virtual campus e-learning course, went online at [www.nahris.ch](http://www.nahris.ch) on 24 October 2005. NAHRIS is the acronym of the English-language internet platform and stands for "Dealing with Natural Hazards and Risks". The platform was created as part of a CENAT Project – the interdisciplinary research centre for natural hazards in Switzerland.

The principal aim of the programme is to provide widely accessible teaching modules on natural hazard management for basic and specialised study programmes at universities using new information technologies. NAHRIS is also targeted at students of secondary schools and the worldwide research community. Users have the opportunity to take part free of charge in more than 90 online learning modules that can be used independently of time and space.

Information: <http://www.cenat.ch> (de/en/fr/it)

## International Mountain Day 2005

(20.10.2005) The theme chosen for this year's International Mountain Day is "Sustainable Tourism for Poverty Alleviation in Mountain Areas". As in the two previous years it is being held on 11 December. International Mountain Day is an occasion to heighten the awareness about the perils and potentials of tourism in mountain areas amongst a wide audience. While tourism has opened up a number of attractive prospects for many mountain communities (better income, new markets, cultural exchanges, etc.), it also often has a destructive impact on the environment or the existence of the mountain communities, particularly amongst the poorer sections of the population. Sustainable tourism however strives to meet the needs of both tourists and local communities. International Mountain Day is therefore an occasion to appeal to everyone to guide the trend in tourism towards 'sustainable tourism' to help alleviate poverty in mountain regions. An FAO (Food and Agricultural Organisation) task force is co-ordinating events around the world to mark International Mountain Day, and providing information material. Source and information: <http://www.fao.org/mnts> (fr/en)

Tourism has to take account of the local population's needs.



© <http://www.fao.org>

## Alpine landscape too bright at night

(17.11.2005) Swiss researchers have conducted a study to examine the extent to which man-made lighting has penetrated mountain regions since the 1970s. The comparison of satellite imagery shows that areas which previously were lit only in isolated spots – if at all – are now increasingly exposed to night time lighting. The changes have been particularly visible in boundary areas of the Alps: at night Milan's metropolitan area and Switzerland's Mittelland in particular have almost become a sea of lights.

Between 1992 and 2000 alone the surface area affected by particularly strong lighting has doubled while the light intensity of the light sources has also increased. Reasons include the spread of motorisation and settlement areas as well as the growing trend in lighting for advertising or decorative purposes. Brighter nights affect not only the natural day-and-night rhythm of human beings but also the living conditions of many animals. And it is not just nature conservationists who are calling for darkness to be protected as a natural resource. Rising energy consumption is yet another aspect of this phenomenon.

Sources and information: [http://saturn.unibe.ch/rsbern/publication/fulltext/maus\\_230.pdf](http://saturn.unibe.ch/rsbern/publication/fulltext/maus_230.pdf) (en),  
[http://www.nfp48.ch/projekte/projectdocs/3/FiatLux\\_Workshop\\_04.doc](http://www.nfp48.ch/projekte/projectdocs/3/FiatLux_Workshop_04.doc) (de),  
[http://saturn.unibe.ch/rsbern/publication/fulltext/maus\\_13\\_aug.gif](http://saturn.unibe.ch/rsbern/publication/fulltext/maus_13_aug.gif) (Animation)

## New issue of the *Journal of Alpine Research* series

(17.11.2005) The latest issue of the *Revue de Géographie Alpine* series comprises five specialist articles on a variety of topics. One article examines the causes of flooding and the measures that are necessary to prevent it based on the example of the Isère/F region while another article focuses on sustainable water management in general. The interplay between natural, the local population and tourism is highlighted using the example of Verbier/CH. The two other contributions look at the ecological repercussions of surrendering farming land and how to cope with avalanches. All the texts are published in both French and English.

Bibliography: *La revue de géographie alpine*/Journal of Alpine Research, Vol. 93, No. 3, September 2005, Mélanges 2005/Miscellaneous articles 2005, Grenoble, ISSN 0035-1121, 143 pages, to order: [http://iga.ujf-grenoble.fr/territoires/editions/RGA/RGA\\_infos.htm](http://iga.ujf-grenoble.fr/territoires/editions/RGA/RGA_infos.htm) (fr)

## Swiss Bird Index tracks Alpine birds

(06.10.2005) The Sempach Ornithological Station and the Swiss Association for the Protection of Birds [*Schweizer Vogelschutz*] have developed a Swiss Bird Index (SBI) modelled on stock exchange indices. The SBI describes the state of ornithology in Switzerland in scientific yet easily understandable terms, with the situation of ornithology representative of biodiversity as a whole. The SBI comprises a set of indices and shows how the population of 169 breeding bird species has developed since 1990.

Bird species have developed differently in different habitats. Alpine birds as a whole have done well. By contrast species populations living in cultivated land and dependent on wetlands and waterways have been recessive, as have 38 of the most endangered species on the Red List. The SBI is analogous to the Wild Bird Indicator recognised by the European Union, which tracks the trend in breeding bird populations throughout Europe.

Source and information: <http://www.vogelwarte.ch> (de/fr)

## Miscellaneous

### Satellite technology in South Tyrol

(20.10.2005) By October of next year, South Tyrol/I wants to be able to receive data from the various earth observation satellites and evaluate it at a purpose-built facility at the European Academy in Bolzano. An earth station is expected to be erected on the Rittner Horn. The spectrum of applications for the data will range from calculations of snow levels with centimetre accuracy and the observation of glacier ice to the monitoring of slopes at risk from mud slides and the tracking of air pollution, land use, agricultural management and husbandry, and zone of geological risk.

Source and information: [http://www.provinz.bz.it/LPA/news/news\\_d.asp?art=115238&HLM=1](http://www.provinz.bz.it/LPA/news/news_d.asp?art=115238&HLM=1) (de/it)

### "Pearls of the Alps" – Tourism communities promote gentle mobility

(20.10.2005) 25 communities in Italy, Austria, Germany, France and Switzerland have come together to form the "Pearls of the Alps" network. Their objective is to combine tourist sights with the benefits of gentle mobility. The individual pearls boast not only a well developed public transport network and easy accessibility using intercity transport but also good connections among themselves. They also strive to promote local culture such as handicrafts or regional cooking and cultural exchanges between the pearls. The idea was initiated by Alps Mobility II, an EU Interreg III B Project.

Sources and information: <http://www.trafico.at/alpsmobility> (de/fr/it/en),

[http://www.provinz.bz.it/lpa/news/news\\_d.asp?art=115651](http://www.provinz.bz.it/lpa/news/news_d.asp?art=115651) (de/it)

### Socio-economic dimension of the Alpine Convention

(20.10.2005) Austria's Chair of the Alpine Convention sees it as a priority task to focus more on specialist issues during the meetings of the Standing Committee in order once again to develop a greater sensibility for vital issues in the alpine region. <http://www.umwelt.net.at/article/articleview/34329/1/9217> now features a summary in four languages (de/fr/it/sl) of the first focal point event held in Villach/A in 2005 on the issue of "Socio-economic Dimensions of the Alpine Convention with Special Consideration of the Role of the Alpine Towns". The second focal-point event took place in Galtür/A on 27 September and addressed the issue of Climate and Natural Hazards.

## Agenda

International Colloquium: **Sustainable Tourism in Alpine Protected Area**; 24-26.11.2005, Nice/F; conference languages: French, German, Italian; organisers: Alpine Network of Protected Areas, Mercantour National Park; Information: <http://www.alparc.org/ConfNice> (fr/de/it)

7<sup>th</sup> International Tourism Summits: **Innovation and Welcome: Can Tourism Be Made Both More Human and More Competitive?**; 07-09.12.2005, Chamonix/F; conference languages: French, English, German; organisers: l'Association des Sommets du Tourisme; Information: <http://www.sommets-tourisme.org> (fr/en)

International Conference: **Management of Conflicts between Wildlife and Human Resource Use**; 25-27.01.2006, Leipzig/D; conference language: English; organisers: Framework for Biodiversity Reconciliation Action Plans; Information: <http://www.frap-project.ufz.de/conference.html> (en)

European Conference: **'Challenges and Innovations facing Environment, Transport and Tourism**; 30-31.01.2006, Vienna/A; conference language: English, German; organisers: respect - Institut für Integrativen Tourismus und Entwicklung; Information: <http://www.eco-travel.at/english> (en/de)

**World Sustainable Energy Days 2006**; 01-03.03.2006, Wels/A; conference language: English; organisers: Oberösterreichischer Energiesparverband; Information: <http://www.wsed.at> (en)

International Conference: **All About Karst & Water – Decision-making in a Sensitive Environment**; 09-11.10.2006, Vienna/A; conference language: English; organisers: Interreg IIIB Cadses; Information: <http://www.kater2006.at> (en)

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### Oh!...

... If he had his way, the President of Turin Province, Antonio Saitta, would pull down the bobsleigh run built in Turin for the 2006 Olympic Winter Games the moment the Games were over. Saitta justified his statement with the annual maintenance costs of €700,000. The run, which cost €50 million to build, is unlikely to see much use after the Winter Olympics as very few people actually practise this sport. The 1,435 m bobsleigh circuit is equipped with a refrigerating plant that contains 48 tonnes of ammonia. It stands on the territory of the community of Cesana and was funded with public-sector money. It is not yet known who will own the bob run in future and, as a result, be burdened with the expenditure for its maintenance after the Games.

Source: La Repubblica 13.10.2005