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ECONNECT project on the move

The ECONNECT project has been ongoing for one year. It has become obvious to all involved partners and stakeholders that the implementation of ecological connectivity is a great challenge. There are a lot of different and very complex questions to be answered before setting out the corridors and stepping stones for animal and plant species to spread out at local, regional and the Alpine level.

The work in the different fields of activity in the project has been steadily ongoing according to the original time schedule. During the next partner meeting on October 14, 2009 in Berchtesgaden the next main co-ordination tasks will be discussed and are currently being prepared.

Additionally to the daily project work, ECONNECT is setting up contacts with different initiatives dealing with the establishment of ecological networks at the European level. The Lead Partner participated in a workshop organized by the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP) in Brussels end of June 2009 in order to introduce the ECONNECT approach to other projects and initiatives. One of the main outcomes of the meeting was the reflection on the key factors for success or failure of establishing ecological networks, published in the 'Guidelines for involving stakeholders in the implementation of ecological networks' by ECNC (European Centre for Nature Conservation). Another important potential cooperation is the project TransEcoNet in the ETC cooperation area 'Central Europe'. A representative of TransEcoNet will participate at the next public ECONNECT meeting in Grenoble in November 2009 in order to support the linkage to the Carpathian mountain area. The Lead Partner is also contributing to strategic discussions in the frame of the Continuum Project regarding e.g. the setup of a connectivity competence network or the evaluation and further development of the Continuum Project.

Chris Walzer, University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna



ECONNECT is not only making efforts for ecological connectivity inside the Alps but also with neighbouring mountain areas such as the Appenine or the Carpathians.

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Common approaches for ECONNECT pilot regions

Representatives from all seven pilot regions and from all work packages assisted to the international pilot region meeting “Coordination and approaches for pilot regions of ECONNECT” in Zernez, Switzerland from 18 to 20 May 2009. A guideline for pilot regions and a concrete procedure for a regional and Alps wide approach, elaborated by the Continuum Project, have been approved.



The international pilot region meeting in Zernez brought together the project partners and representatives of all pilot regions.

© Task Force Protected Areas

For the Alps wide approach a set of species has been selected: red deer (*Cervus elaphus*), black grouse (*Tetrao tetrix*), fish otter (*Lutra lutra*), bullhead (*Cottus gobio*), 3 large carnivores: wolf (*Canis lupus*), brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) and lynx (*Lynx lynx*) and the griffon vulture (*Gyps fulvus*). Each region will choose whether to base its work on the habitat approach or on the species approach. A mixture of both approaches was recommended by the WP leader and the leading partner. Each pilot region will identify further species adapted to its special needs.

Mapping the connectivity situation on an Alps wide scale was considered a necessity and will be carried out in common by the workpackages on data management, on barriers and corridors and on the implementation in pilot regions. A standard index based on a wide range of criteria will support the mapping (see also next article). Finally, two working groups for the coordination have been established: implementation strategy/data needs, information and communication strategies.

Delphine Maurice, TFPA

Mapping Alpine connectivity: Challenges and benefits for ECONNECT’s pilot regions

Ecological connectivity is highly depending on each species or at least species group. In order to improve connectivity, corridors are set up in order to provide an ecological continuum that can ensure migration and dispersal of species in the Alps. To come to reality, corridors need the implementation of concrete measures in the field on a landscape level, covering the needs of as many species as possible. In addition, each corridor area has to fulfill a set of other functions that have to be taken into account.

These different demands raise questions that the ECONNECT pilot regions, which should initiate concrete actions to improve the “ecological continuum”, have to answer: Where is the best place to implement measures? How can this challenge be explained to the different actors? How can local stakeholders be involved so that the “ecological continuum” can be realized in a collaborative manner? Maps can support these discussions by showing where there is a need for action, where connectivity is still assured and where ecological measures have already been realized. In order to produce such maps on an Alps wide scale, indicators are needed that are not depending on single species, including existing threats, weaknesses but also the strengths and opportunities.

To ensure a comparable approach for all ECONNECT pilot regions, a working group with representatives from different project partners has been set up. The working group has defined a set of approximately 14 indicators, ranging from information on the urbanisation and infrastructure to identify threats and weaknesses to landscape heterogeneity or planned ecological measures. The single indicators will be merged into a spatial index indicating the potential of each area unit for animal dispersal and migration, showing the main factors influencing this potential positively or negatively. Before the next working group meeting in November, each pilot region will identify available and missing spatial data that is needed to describe the indicators.

Ruedi Haller, Swiss National Park

Viewing and downloading connectivity data: developing an online portal

Regarding Data Management the GeoPortal is taking shape. The aim of this service is to enable spatial data and metadata to be explored, viewed and in some cases downloaded online. The system is being developed at Eurac. In a next step the repository will be populated with the relevant spatial data sets. Some data will be made available by web mapping and web feature services depending on the license restrictions. Users of the system are organised as groups to control different access rights of Project Partners and the general public. The Alpine-wide base line data such as land cover, hydrology, elevation model and infrastructure at a scale of 1:100,000 to 1:500,000 have been gathered and pre-processed. In the Pilot Regions the data collection process is progressing. Eurac is coordinating the user right agreements made with the administrations owning the data. At the moment of writing, data was made available by the Regions of Salzburg, Tyrol, South Tyrol, Lombardia and Trento.

Kathrin Renner, EURAC

Researching legal barriers to ecological connectivity

The European Academy of Bolzano (EURAC), in cooperation with the Italian Ministry of the Environment and CIPRA France, made national assessments concerning the legal framework on protected areas. These national assessments were presented in Domossola/I on 16 April 2009 during the first workshop organized in the framework of WP6 and were reexamined according to the discussions.

The day after the workshop an international conference on transborder cooperation between protected areas (Cooperazione transfrontaliera tra aree protette alpine) was organized by the Italian Ministry of the Environment in collaboration with EURAC and the Centro Studi Val d'Ossola in the framework of the project. The objective of the conference was to obtain a better understanding of transborder cooperation between protected areas in the Alpine arc, in particular with regard to the new European legal instrument, the EGCT (introduced by the Regulation (EC) N°1082/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006).

EURAC, in cooperation with the Italian Ministry of the Environment, is also realizing a study about the new European tool for transborder cooperation: the European Grouping on Territorial Cooperation (EGTC).

The main points of the study are the following:

- Presentation of this instrument and of the legal context in terms of transborder cooperation
- The instruments adopted in each Alpine State for the implementation of Regulation n° 1082/2006
- SWOT analysis concerning the use of this instrument for transborder cooperation between protected areas.

Céline Randier, EURAC

To analyse contexts and legal tools for the implementation of ecological connectivity in Alpine countries CIPRA France will organise a workshop in Grenoble on 28 January 2010. This workshop will give the opportunity to present an inventory of measures and legal frameworks implemented by stakeholders in the pilot regions. The aim of the workshop is to produce constructive exchanges between all participants. These discussions will give the opportunity to formalise recommendations approved by the great majority, in order to create a better use of legal tools allowing the implementation of ecological connectivity in the Alps.

Delphine Charpin, CIPRA France



International workshop: Sharing knowledge for the implementation of ecological corridors within and beyond the Alps

From November 4th to 6th 2009 an international workshop will take place in Grenoble/F in order to discuss and demonstrate needs and options for actions as well as to develop innovative instruments for ecological connectivity.

An important aim of the workshop is to discuss and exchange common methodological tools and concepts for a common understanding of the project aims. A knowledge transfer action will then be discussed for other mountain regions. Knowledge-transfer activities are targeted to reach key actors at all levels regarding their roles as stakeholders, conservation managers, NGOs, GOs, scientists, or opinion leaders. Speakers from the Netherlands and from Spain will explain their experiences related to the improvement of ecological connectivity. Field trips and small working groups will promote exchange and discussion among all workshop participants.

The workshop is organised by the University of Innsbruck, by the Cemagref Grenoble and by the Conseil Général de l'Isère. A simultaneous translation in English and French language will be provided.

Further information and registration at: <http://econnect2009.congres-scientifique.com/index.php?langue=en>

Improving ecological networks on the ground in pilot regions

Pilot region Berchtesgaden – Salzburg

In the German-Austrian pilot region “Berchtesgaden – Salzburg” important steps have been done towards the definition of regional focus species and activities in the course of ECONNECT. The process has been initiated by a workshop with representatives from all relevant authorities. As a result a first assessment of species which might be affected by landscape fragmentation in the pilot region was prepared. Moreover, following the method developed in the Continuum Project, potential measures have been collected that could be implemented within ECONNECT.

In the following the proposals of the workshop have been completed and validated by semi-structured expert interviews in order to identify main activities to support an ecological network in the pilot region. The interviews provide more detailed information on certain needs and possible measures for different species. Thus, they concretise activities which are suitable to be implemented in the course of ECONNECT.

On the occasion of the international conference “Ecological networks in the Alps” a selection of focus species and activities for the pilot region “Berchtesgaden – Salzburg” will be presented for the first time to the public giving an idea what kind of measures might be put into practice within the next two years. The conference takes place from 15-16 October in Berchtesgaden.

National Park Berchtesgaden



Representatives of relevant authorities discussing potential measures for the implementation of ecological connectivity in the pilot region Berchtesgaden - Salzburg.
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Catalogue of connectivity measures: new publication in English, German and Italian

The Continuum Project just published online a catalogue of possible measures for improving ecological connectivity in English, German and Italian language. The catalogue explains how extensivisation of agricultural use, species conservation measures along transport routes or creating synergies with tourism can contribute to the implementation of ecological networks. 69 exemplary measures from all Alpine countries show how areas or structures can be created, conserved or restored so that they can play a role as connecting elements within an ecological network. An associated Excel database helps people in pilot

regions or in all other regions where connectivity needs to be improved to find measures corresponding to different contexts.

A French translation will be made available in October. The translation of the catalogue in English and Italian has been financed by the German Environment Ministry.

The catalogue and the database can be downloaded on: <http://www.alpine-ecological-network.org/index.php/services-mainmenu-8/downloads-documents>

Aurelia Ullrich, CIPRA International

Raising awareness on connectivity: preparing the Year of Biodiversity 2010

ECONNECT represents an opportunity to raise awareness among decision-makers, stakeholders and a wider public about the importance of ecological networks as an effective way to preserve biodiversity and about the need for a new development model for the Alps based not on new infrastructures but on a sustainable management of natural resources. The International Year of Biodiversity 2010 offers a great chance to facilitate the wide communication on ecological connectivity. All project partners and in particular the pilot regions are invited to think about ways of making use of this unique opportunity during the whole next year. One particular occasion will be the International Day of Biodiversity, 22 May 2010.

In order to enlighten ECONNECT objectives and activities, Work Package 3 (Communication and Publicity) has developed different activities. One of the first steps of the year has been the development of the communication strategy, which is currently under review. Another step has been the enhancement of the ECONNECT website (www.econnectproject.eu), which now contains new useful sections such as "News & Events" and the "Calendar", in order to be updated with ECONNECT events and other important dates in environmental field. Currently, a project flyer is being developed.

Danusia Piovesana, WWF Italy

Connectivity events you should not miss

International conference: **"Ecological network in the Alps – a response to climate change that will conserve biodiversity?"** 15.-16.10.2009,. Berchtesgaden/D. Info: www.alparc.org/event-calendar/events-of-alparc/international-conference-alpine-ecological-network. Languages: German, French, Italian, English

International workshop: **Sharing knowledge for the implementation of an ecological continuum within and beyond the Alps** (in the frame of ECONNECT WP8). 4-6.11.2009, Grenoble/F. Further information and registration at: <http://econnect2009.congres-scientifique.com/index.php?langue=en>. Languages: English, French

International workshop: **Contexts and legal tools for the implementation of ecological networks through Alpine States** (in the frame of ECONNECT WP6). 28.1.2010, Grenoble/F. Language: English

International conference: **Delivering biodiversity targets: 2010 and beyond - Protected Areas and Ecological Networks in Europe**. 25.-27.1.2010, Madrid/ES.
www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/nature/EcoNetworks/Documents/2009/02Draftprogramme2009_en.pdf

Congress: **NATUR Congress "Biodiversity – Our Future"**. 12.2.2010. Basel/CH. A workshop on ecological networks is organised by the Continuum Project. <http://www.natur.ch/veranstaltungen/kongress/natur-kongress-409/>. Languages of the Congress: German, French, language of the workshop: German

More connectivity events are listed on www.econnectproject.eu/cms/?q=calendar and on www.cipra.org/en/alpmedia/dossiers/13 (please check the German, French, Italian and Slovenian language versions for further events).

Recent publications you should consult

European Centre for Nature Conservation, 2009: **Making the connection! Guidelines for involving stakeholders in the implementation of ecological networks.** 48 pages.

www.ecologicalnetworks.eu/documents/publications/ken/rapport_web.pdf

ALPARC, 2009: **Large carnivores in the Alps and Carpathians: Living with the wildlife.** 24 pages. Available in English, German, French, Italian and Slovenian. www.alparc.org/resources/our-publications/brochures/large-carnivores-in-the-alps-and-carpathians-living-with-the-wildlife

Silja Tiemann, Rosemarie Siebert, 2009: **Ecological Networks implemented by participatory approaches as a response to landscape fragmentation:** a review of German literature. 8 pages.

www.cipra.org/en/alpmedia/publications/3986

IUCN, 2010: **Connectivity Conservation Management.** A global guide.

www.earthscan.co.uk/default.aspx?tabid=101775

More recent and also older publications are listed on www.cipra.org/en/alpmedia/dossiers/13 (please check the German, French, Italian and Slovenian language versions for further publications).

ECONNECT Project: Restoring the web of life

Connecting habitats and protected areas all over the Alps is the new conservation frontier: an ambitious international project funded by the EU in the framework of the Alpine Space Programme aims at establishing an Alps - wide ecological network.

The ECONNECT project will bring a major and innovative contribution to the conservation of the Alps' outstanding biodiversity. Sixteen partners from six Alpine countries have come together to promote a dynamic approach to conserving the natural heritage of the Alps.

The project became operational in September 2008 and will run until the end of August 2011.

The activities of ECONNECT contribute to the implementation of the Alpine Convention (Art. 12 Nature Conservation Protocol) which is binding for the signatory states according to international law.

Project Partners

Lead partner: University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna; Research Institute of Wildlife Ecology (FIWI) (A)

Other partners: University of Innsbruck, Institute of Ecology (A) Umweltbundesamt GmbH (A) National Park Gesäuse GmbH (A) National Park Hohe Tauern (A) Italian Ministry of Environment (I) European Academy of Bolzano (I) WWF Italy (I) Nature Park Alpi Marittime (I) Autonomous Region Valle d'Aosta (I) General Council of the Department of Isere (F) Task Force Protected Areas of the Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention (F) Scientific research centre CEMAGREF (F) National Park Berchtesgaden (DE) CIPRA International (LI) Swiss National Park (CH)

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