

“Rebuilding natural bridges in South-western Europe”

THE GREAT MOUNTAIN CORRIDOR INITIATIVE ON ECOLOGICAL CONNECTIVITY BETWEEN THE CANTABRIC MOUNTAINS, THE PYRENEES, THE MASSIF CENTRAL AND WESTERN ALPS

Declaration of les Planes de Son

1. Given the outstanding values of the natural and cultural heritage which are found in the Cantabric Mountains, the Pyrennees, the French Massif Central, and the Western Alps, as well as its transitional areas, which constitute the largest natural ecosystems of South-Western Europe, as well as some of its richest biodiversity areas.
2. Recognising that these mountains are the water towers for most rivers of South-Western Europe, providing this vital element for the people and other species of this region.
3. Given the mandates of the Convention on the conservation of migratory wildlife species (Bonn, 1979) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (Rio de Janeiro, 1992) and the chapter 13 on sustainable management of mountain ecosystems of the Agenda 21 (Rio de Janeiro, 1992).
4. Given the commitments of the Convention on the conservation of wildlife and natural environment of Europe (Bern, 1979) and the European Convention on Landscape (Florence, 2000).
5. Given the commitments of the Pan-European Landscape and Biological Diversity Strategy (1995) and the proposal of the Pan-European ecological network promoted by the Council of Europe.
6. Given the commitments from the European Directive on wild birds (1979) and the Directive on habitats (1992) that must be transposed into the legal system of the Member States of the European Union, through effective means to build the Natura 2000 network.
7. Recalling the Resolution of IUCN on the Mediterranean mountains (RESWCC3.039)
8. Conscious of the opportunities that the natural areas included in the Natura 2000 network (which amount to almost 40% of the Initiative area) will offer for the long term conservation of a large-scale functional ecological network in its geographical area.
9. Aware that fragmentation is already threatening significant portions of the transitional areas between those mountain ranges, and that, in addition, begins to create significant challenges within these mountains, and knowing that these trends could create serious threats to biodiversity conservation, in particular taking into consideration the synergic potential impacts of global climate change.
10. Aware of the need to promote preventive strategies to avoid further fragmentation and at the same time, promote the restoration of key areas that have already been critically impacted.

11. Encouraged by the progress that has been done during the last years by some public agencies in the scope of the Initiative (states, autonomous communities, regions, historic territories, protected areas, etc.) and NGOs on this respect, including a number of studies, plans and programmes, at different scales, as well as the fact that they have developed some significant experiences on the incorporation of ecological permeability criteria into the territorial planning and infrastructure projects.
12. Encouraged by the Initiative of Mountain Connectivity proposed by the IUCN at the last World Park Congress (Durban 2003), and by the work done by the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas Mountains Biome in Montreal (1997) and Colombia (1999), and at the International Conference on Mountain Corridors, Banff (Canada, 2004).
13. Encouraged, as well, by similar initiatives of cooperation in other European mountain ranges, specially the Alpine Network of Protected Areas, of which this Initiative is an extension towards the South-West.
14. Aware that similar initiatives are under way all over the world, and recalling the importance of thinking big, both in time and space.

The participants of the International Congress of Mountain Corridors commit themselves to

1. Promote awareness and take action on the need to maintain or restore viable populations of wide ranging animals, across the landscape to overcome habitat fragmentation and to allow all species to adapt to climate change.
2. Make progress towards the goals of the Pan-European Ecological Network, within the geographical scope of this Initiative, using all existing and future scientific, technical, political, social and economic opportunities.
3. Promote strategies and programmes aimed at integrating the ecological connectivity at different scales, and different levels (not only terrestrial), by means of the territorial, sectoral and local policies, giving special attention to the transition areas between mountain ranges.
4. Promote cooperation and coordination in planning and management with bioregional criteria and trans-frontier approaches, at all relevant scales of government, in particular to share and harmonize databases, maps, lists and studies that could be useful for attaining the above mentioned goals.
5. Promote strategic environmental evaluation, as required by the Directive 2001/42/CE, as an effective tool to integrate the ecological connectivity and permeability criteria in land use and territorial planning as well as infrastructure plans and programmes.
6. Promote the protection and restoration of ecological integrity and connectivity, including opportunities for wildlife movements in areas that have been critically affected, applying, among others, Directive 2000/60/CE, which requires an integrated management of watersheds, taking into consideration their ecological values.
7. Optimise the opportunities that the new European Agrarian Policy offers to promote ecological connectivity through the funding of sound agro-environmental practices.
8. Promote economic and fiscal instruments, such as incentives, to support ecological connectivity, in particular for the restoration of areas that have a key connecting function.

9. Set up a working group to advance the Initiative and monitor its progress toward the attainment of its goals.
10. Engage all the potential public and private stakeholders in this Initiative, working with to achieve increased cooperation towards its goals, at all levels, including local authorities and populations, regional, national and international institutions NGOs, and general public.

Les Planes de Son, Eastern Pyrenees (Catalonia, Spain), 27 of October 2005