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4th International Conference "Water in Mountains" The mountain people are getting mobilized to anticipate the effects of climate change on water resources

Date de mise en ligne : jeudi 19 mars 2015

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The mountain people are getting mobilized to anticipate the effects of climate change on water resources
The "4th International Conference on Water in Mountains", organized by Asters (Upper-Savoy Natural Space Conservancy), the Endowment Fund "Living Mountain" and the International Office for Water (IOWater), took place on 8, 9 and 10 October 2014, in Megeve (Upper Savoy - France).

Following previous meetings in 2002, 2006 and 2010, this conference issued an alert to the need to quickly adopt strategies to adapt to the impacts of global warming on water resources in the mountains, which are areas where the main large European rivers Ebro, Danube, Po, Rhine, Rhone, and Vistula ... and their major tributaries, originate.

Global warming now seems to be unavoidable and the European mountains are already among the first victims !

With the decrease in snow cover and glacier melt, the water regimes of all major European rivers coming from mountains are now changing.

However, the flow regularity of these rivers is crucial for the supply of drinking water to populations, and for the economic development at the foothills and in the plains (hydropower, inland navigation, irrigation, tourism or still the cooling of thermal or nuclear power plants...).

Meeting water needs in the future and for all purposes is thus everybody's business.

Water management in the upper river basins is a strategic issue for the mountain people, but also for the populations and economies … in the plains !

It is thus necessary to act quickly if we want our mountains to remain "Europe's Water Towers".

Flood frequency and intensity will greatly increase in autumn, winter and spring, as well as summer droughts.

Climate change in mountains will also generate severe erosion, landslides, degradation in river quality and an increase in water temperature. Hydropower production could be reduced by 15% ; cooling of thermal and nuclear power plants will be more difficult ; river navigation will have to adapt ; competition between water uses will become fiercer.

Time is running out : we must now identify and model these changes at local level in order to undertake the field actions that are urgently needed !

Field experiments were presented at the "Conference on Water in Mountains". They work and produce results that can be replicated ; we must disseminate them :

- First, saving water and facilitating recycling : leak detection in drinking water supply systems, the reuse of treated wastewater, groundwater recharge, promoting the efficient use of water must become a priority.
- Next, rethinking the management of water, lakes, wetlands and mountain soils, taking into account the strategic constraints of the supply of water to the population and agricultural, industrial and tourist economies at the foothills and in plains downstream. We must develop "a new culture of risk".
- Finally, better recognizing the role of mountains for the community as a whole from upstream to down - stream areas, under integrated basin policies.

This will require strengthening the institutional and financial mechanisms and refocusing them towards these new priorities, as in the case of the new French Law "GEMAPI" (Management of Aquatic Ecosystems and Flood Prevention). Planning must be made in the basins of large rivers and based on strong intersectoral and international cooperation when river basins are transboundary as in the case of the Rhone, with French-Swiss cooperation.

With the Water Framework Directive of 2000 and its related Directives, the European Union has an effective tool to truly apply these adaptation strategies. Moreover, it requires from the Member States that they incorporate appropriate measures in the coming Basin Management Plans and Programs of Measures 2016 - 2021, then 2021-2027. Let's quickly implement them !

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The participants also decided to establish a "Network of Water Stakeholders in Mountains" to sustain their work between two "Megeve" conferences, to exchange and promote these good practices.