

# **Actions of the International Association for Mediterranean Forests to Prevent Forest Fires<sup>1</sup>**

## **International Association for Mediterranean Forests<sup>2</sup>**

### **Abstract**

The objective of the International Association for Mediterranean Forests is to facilitate exchanges of knowledge and experience between people concerned about Mediterranean forest areas.

In pursuit of this goal, in 2001 the IAMF organised a seminar<sup>3</sup> in Valencia (Spain) concerning the risks incurred by Mediterranean forests, as part of the Interreg IIC project "The Problem of the Mediterranean Forest". Following on from this, it has set up a number of projects<sup>4</sup> entitled "Structuring of networks and co-operation actions for the Mediterranean forest", and invited southern European Union partners to take part in them. The aim of these projects is to promote sustainable management of forests and to ensure they are taken into greater account in land-use planning policies.

They will take the form of exchanges between personnel from different organisations who will carry out experimental management operations in pilot territories.

Most of these actions<sup>5</sup> are concerned with fire risk prevention through planning and organisation of forest areas.

The success of these operations will depend not only on the local projects themselves, but equally on the energy and dedication that will be devoted to the exchanges.

In order for the lessons learned to be beneficial to as many people as possible, they will be summarised and analysed by the IAMF, and then disseminated widely throughout its network. It will be possible to capitalise on them in the project currently under preparation "Mediterranean forests faced with worldwide concerns and local demands" which will lead to the First Mediterranean conference on forest and natural land areas.

## **Introduction**

The International Association for Mediterranean Forests is the only non-governmental organisation concerned with every aspect of Mediterranean forests and natural land areas. It is therefore naturally interested in the risks incurred by Mediterranean forests,

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<sup>1</sup> An abbreviated version of this paper was presented at the second international symposium on fire economics, policy, and planning: a global view, 19–22 April, 2004, Córdoba, Spain.

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<sup>3</sup> This resulted in the "Valencia Conclusions."

<sup>4</sup> As part of the Interreg IIIB community project. The "Recoforme" project in the Medoc zone has the following partners: the **National Vesuvius Park** (It.) — which is the project leader, the Umbria Region (It.), the Generalitat Valenciana (Sp.), the Murcia Region (Sp.), The Algarve Regional Directorate of Agriculture (Pt.), the Alpillès Massif management office (Fr.) and the **IAMF** as technical advisor.

The "Foremed" project in the Sudoe zone comprises the **Association of forest landowners in Soria** (Sp.) —which is the project leader—the Murcia Region (Sp.), the AFLOPS association (Pt.), FORESTIS (Pt.) and the Regional forest landownership centre for Languedoc-Roussillon (Fr.).

<sup>5</sup> For example: experiments in development techniques making use of "biological engineering," land-use planning that will include preventive forestry techniques, forest area management models, operations to reduce combustible material as part of forest fire protection systems, and training of forest fire brigades.

and in particular forest fires. Below we present the actions the IAMF has taken and is taking to help prevent forest fires, first of all through the projects that it has led or is leading, such as "The Problem of the Mediterranean Forest", "Structuring of networks and co-operation actions for the Mediterranean forest" (RECOFORME ) and "Mediterranean forests faced with worldwide concerns and local demands" (FOMEMOND), and also via the projects it has initiated such as "Organisation of networks and co-operation actions for Mediterranean forests" (FOREMED) led by the Association of forest landowners in Sória.

## **The Interreg IIC-Medoc "The Problem of the Mediterranean Forest" - Conclusions from Valencia<sup>6</sup>**

The seminar "Risks Threatening Mediterranean Woodlands and Natural Land Areas and the Role of Woodlands in Risk Prevention" resulted in the drafting of a number of conclusions which have been named "The Conclusions from Valencia".

Within the framework of the Interreg IIC programme entitled "The Problem of the Mediterranean Forest", in which are involved the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (France) and the Campania (Italy) Regions, a group of experts on risks met with representatives of the International Association for Mediterranean Forests in Valencia (Spain) on 8-9 June 2001, at the invitation of the Environment Council of the Valencia Region. The meeting undertook a consideration of the situation regarding forests around the Mediterranean Rim and adopted the following conclusions:

1. Mediterranean woodlands are made up of natural land environments that are subject to a Mediterranean bioclimate. Such woodlands range from extremely deteriorated areas afflicted by erosion to the most magnificent stands. These woodlands are subject to various risks, some natural, some human, which threaten their function in protection or production as well as in their social and cultural role. Yet these functions or roles are all indispensable if human activity in the region is to reach its full development.

2. Certain risks, like wildfire, have increased over the last few decades, bringing in their wake other problems such as erosion, the increase of pests and diseases, a decline in water reserves and the development of urbanisation. Risks, interacting with natural phenomena like drought, increase the vulnerability of woodlands and lead to people being endangered. Hence the need to take preventive measures to avoid the accumulative effect of the various risks.

3. Socio-economic factors influence the evolution of risk e.g. the abandonment of agricultural land on the northern side of the Mediterranean Rim; human pressure on woodlands on the southern side; the gulf that is generally widening between urban and rural populations.

4. The risks that threaten Mediterranean woodlands are not well understood in countries that are not themselves Mediterranean. This fact has negative consequences on policy decisions made by international organisations or leads to their lack of interest in Mediterranean matters. In particular, it has been noted that, in certain situations, European Union sheep and goat livestock grants have generated increased risk of wildfire on account of inadequate prior consultation and cooperation between the forestry and livestock advisory services. Similarly, the FAO has significantly reduced

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<sup>6</sup> Workshop " Risks threatening Mediterranean forests and natural land areas and the role of forests in risk prevention" held on 8th-9th June 2001 in Valencia (Spain), led by Ricardo Velez Muñoz, Head of the Wildfire Protection Service of the Spanish General Service for the Protection of Nature (Madrid, Spain).

the activity it used to foster through the *Silva Mediterranea* commission. This situation contrasts starkly with the need to counteract the desertion of rural areas by their inhabitants which is the ultimate risk threatening extensive mountain regions around the Mediterranean.

5. It was felt to be essential to bring society at large to an understanding of the vital role played by Mediterranean woodlands in the quality of the Mediterranean environment. It seems clearly indispensable that a policy specifically for Mediterranean woodlands must be designed and put into effect. To this end, we need to develop a broad vision of woodland management, centred on silviculture and coordinated with land use development policy, having as its aims: 1/ that forests should be wanted and considered useful by the whole population as fitting in with its actual needs; 2/ the establishment of a reasoned management policy, based on scientific and technical knowledge and know-how, that will take into account the interrelation between risks of wildfire and those from pests, disease, erosion, flooding and loss of biodiversity; 3/ the bringing together of all concerned with Mediterranean woodlands so that everyone can submit his or her ideas about policies and collaborate to get them put into effect. Such people include, notably, public and private owners of woodlands, professional foresters, researchers, fire prevention and firefighting authorities, local elected bodies, the media, NGOs and managers of protected areas and reserves.

6. It was felt that the prevention and control of risks that threaten woodlands can only be achieved with the full involvement of owners who, on the northern Mediterranean, are mostly private; and, on the southern side of the Rim, of users. To this end it is necessary to promote effective organisation of voluntary associations which facilitate sustainable development of woodlands. This point was recently accepted in various international gatherings, including ministerial conferences at Helsinki and Lisbon.

7. It is essential that the damage resulting from the various risks that prevail around the Mediterranean be monitored. By this means, their extent and evolution can be assessed as a means of foreseeing short- and middle-term problems via an overall map plotting risk factors. In particular, we should base efforts here on the decentralised databank of forest fires that was set up in the 90's by the FAO's *Silva Mediterranea* commission. By the same token, we consider that it is necessary to create and distribute maps charting the wildfire threat during the peak risk periods throughout the whole of the Mediterranean zone. Furthermore, it is essential to extend to the eastern Mediterranean and North African areas the programme for monitoring the state of forest health that presently covers a large part of Europe. For all these aspects, we feel that it is essential to contact the European Commission in order to highlight the desirability of updating and reinforcing the regulations governing protection from and prevention of wildfire and pollution.

8. We need to establish a Mediterranean-wide strategy for mutual help in times of acute crisis due to wildfire or predators (for example, locusts). This strategy should be based on bilateral and multilateral agreements between states, facilitating the loan of equipment and offers of help from areas able to make such things available to other areas under the greatest threat.

9. There is a need for study of risk due to other factors capable of affecting woodland environments, such as the expansion of invasive species, be they plant or animal.

10. As a final recommendation, we consider it necessary to tackle the risks to Mediterranean woodlands in a preventive manner, in conformity with present and future models derived from dynamic socio-economic and forestry factors. We thus

propose continuing the work undertaken at the seminar in the light of the current project "The Problem of the Mediterranean Forest", notably within the framework of the Interreg IIIB programme; and that the International Association for Mediterranean Forests continues its activities for the promotion of exchanging information. With all these points in mind, the participants recommended that the First Mediterranean Conference on Forests and Natural Land Areas be organised and held in the near future.

### **Brief presentation of the Interreg IIIB Medoc project RECOFORME "Structuring of networks and co-operation actions for the Mediterranean forest"**

Through the project entitled "Structuring of networks and co-operation actions for the Mediterranean forest" led by the Vesuvius National Park (Italy), we propose to tackle all the issues affecting Mediterranean natural land areas and forests, in order to promote sustainable management of forests and the environment, and ensure they are taken into greater account in land-use planning policies.

To do this it is necessary to make the most of the work carried out in the Interreg IIC project "Problem of the Mediterranean Forest". The project consists of a co-operation programme made up of exchanges between pilot territories: shared implementation and monitoring of sustainable development and planning programmes in the territories. The partners have chosen pilot territories, and in each territory after carrying out an analysis of the situation and the options for action, a project has been launched, comprising programming, execution, monitoring, and assessment phases. In these territories, every aspect of the Mediterranean forests and natural areas will be taken into account (land-use planning, sustainable development, forestry, protection against fires, pastoral agriculture, public access and use, etc.).

Each of these projects is led by a local organisation, and will bring together representatives from the partner regions, for both execution and supervision. This will be achieved through 1/ the participation of foreign technical experts, working side by side with the local team, from one or more partner regions (who in return will include one or more technical experts in their teams), for one or more periods of varying length throughout the programme; 2/ the creation of an inter-regional steering committee which will bring together representatives from the relevant partner regions, and will meet at least once a year.

Each partner region proposes one or more sites that have a predominant characteristic and specific problems to be solved, and where common reflection will be beneficial, not only for the region in question but also for the technicians originating from the partner regions. These exchanges will make it possible to compare each person's know-how in each specific situation: some teams have already solved technical or organisational problems that others have yet to solve. The success of these operations depends on how the co-operation agreements have been prepared, and how they will be set up, managed and supervised. The strictly technical aspects of the projects will be handled virtually exclusively by the partner regions (accommodation in the pilot territories). However, taken as a whole such a project also requires practical management (collection and dissemination of information, organisation of exchanges and travel, capitalisation of outputs, assessment, etc.) by a single operator. The International Association for Mediterranean Forests will play this role, co-ordinating and organising these exchanges between the different structures proposed by the partner regions, and will compile an overview of these exchanges. The relevant

territories are: Campania (Italy): Vesuvio National Park; Valencia (Spain): Comarca Alto Palancia; Umbria (Italy): Catchment basin of Lake Trasimeno; Murcia (Spain): Regional Park of Sierra Espuña; Algarve (Portugal): Serra do Caldeirão; Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (France): Alpilles Massif. Operations on the Campania, Valencia, Murcia and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur sites will essentially be centred on fire risk prevention.

## The Interreg IIC project FOMEMOND : "Mediterranean Forests in relation to World Concerns and Local Demands"

The project "Mediterranean forests in relation to world concerns and local demands" aims to ameliorate the transition to the local practise level, of the world concerns over biodiversity, the fight against desertification, global climatic change, long term forest management, and cultural heritage. These evolutions will be analysed by "type" defined as "major world concerns" viewed from the perspective of international conventions and agreements, in seminars dedicated to each theme, in relationship with the authorities responsible for overseeing the various conventions. The synthesis of these studies will take place during a conference set up with the express aim of producing concrete recommendations from them. This conference will proceed with participants from various levels, from political decision makers to land managers. The conference will not be an end in itself but will give rise to various other activities which might in turn perform the recommendations in some of the areas which will come to light. Thus, the project is composed of three phases (cf. figure n°1).

Figure 1— Steps of the FOMEMOND project



