

Reserves need to be better integrated in their social and economic environment than is currently the case, and act, as far as proves feasible, as bases for the development of surrounding territories. The challenge is indeed great!

How the Convention Works

The Council of Europe, with headquarters in Strasbourg, acts as Secretariat of the Bern Convention. It serves a 'Standing Committee' which meets every year in December to decide on the activities and subjects on which the Convention will concentrate. This Committee amends the Appendices of the Convention and enlarges its scope by way of recommendations and action programmes. Cooperation of all the states participating in the Convention is fundamental to making progress in the conservation issues dealt with, as many environmental problems can only be solved at the international level.

Much of the Bern Convention's work in recent years has been devoted to threatened species, with particular

emphasis on carnivores, plants, amphibians, reptiles, and invertebrates. Many nongovernmental organizations participate very actively in the work of the Standing Committee, and play a fundamental role in developing the Convention. Not only do they bring forward ideas but also 'hot cases' in which the actions of one government risk to be in disagreement with the Convention. The Committee opens files, often sends observers to those 'hotspots', and recommends specific action to be taken by governments. The spirit reigning in Strasbourg is always of fruitful cooperation among states. To complete this aspect of European unity it is fundamental that the new democracies join the Convention.

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Unusually Low Ozone Levels Over Antarctica

A substantial decrease in the ozone layer over Antarctica was announced in September 1992 by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) via its bulletins on the state of the ozone layer disseminated through its Global Telecommunications System (GTS).

Based on the latest reports from Antarctica, WMO states that ozone levels are now from 30 to 35% lower than were the pre-ozone-hole-discovery averages during 1957-77. The depletion is particularly affecting the North-west and parts of the North-east sectors of Antarctica. This unusually early decline started during the last days of August and in early September, spreading over the South Pole and practically everywhere polewards from 70° South during the second week of September 1992. Some stations such as Marambio, Faraday, and Syowa, have registered the lowest daily values for these months of well below 200 ozone units (*m atm cm*).

According to Dr Rumen D. Bojkov, Chief of WMO's Environment Division in Geneva, the air enclosed in the polar stratospheric vortex is extremely cold, reaching temperatures of below minus 85 degrees Celsius in the lower stratosphere. 'This condition is a prerequisite for extensive ozone destruction, once the Sun appears in the Antarctic', Dr Bojkov said. Based on these findings, scientists expect a prolonged 'ozone-hole period' to last until the disintegration of the polar stratospheric vortex which normally occurs each year during the month of November.

The ozone layer screens out the Sun's harmful ultraviolet radiation, which can cause skin cancer, eye cataracts, and a suspected weakening of some human immune systems. Besides the hazards to human health, continued depletion of the ozone layer could have some negative effects on crop yields and aquatic life, as well as in changing the radiative regime of the Earth's atmosphere, that could be expressed by marked cooling in the lower stratosphere.

Since the first reporting of the Antarctic-spring ozone decline in the late 1970s, the total ozone has been

gradually declining each year from the end of August, reaching its lowest ozone values annually during the first part of October, and recovering to normal values in late November. WMO's analysis of the ozone layer for the past ten years shows that the total ozone deficiency in late August this year has been on average approximately 20% below its pre-ozone-hole-discovery values.

Measures are being undertaken to eliminate the production and use of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), which are the main causes of the stratospheric ozone depletion, in accordance with decisions formulated by the Montreal Protocol. A meeting of the Parties to the Protocol is being organized by UNEP in November 1992, to discuss strengthening of Protocol measures against substances that deplete the ozone layer.

The new findings are based on provisional data received by WMO from its member governments' operating Global Atmospheric Watch stations and satellites around the world. These include the Global Ozone Observing System stations in Antarctica operated by Argentina/Finland, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, United Kingdom, and United States, as well as on satellite data provided by the US's National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Updated stratospheric ozone values will be available shortly from the WMO World Ozone Data Centre, based in Toronto, Canada. For further information please contact the undersigned:

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