



KAUNERTAL DECLARATION 2022

YES, TO THE PROTECTION OF ALPINE RIVERS YES, TO A NATURE-FRIENDLY ENERGY TRANSITION NO, TO THE EXPANSION OF THE KAUNERTAL POWER PLANT

The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report clearly shows that climate protection and nature conservation must go hand in hand. The we destroy nature; the more difficult climate protection becomes. The Ötztal Alps are a natural jewel of outstanding importance. A highly specialised diversity of life forms, animal and plant species find here one of their last intact retreats. At the same time, the Ötztal Alps with their numerous glaciers hold the last water reserves of the Eastern Alps. The water-rich glacier rivers still flow largely unaffected in the direction of the Inn. According to a study by the Institute for Social Ecology at the University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences, the Ötztal Alps are also home to one of Austria's largest alpine open spaces, an area that has so far not been built up with large-scale technical infrastructure, and for good reason.

But the planned expansion of the Kaunertal power plant would destroy an important part of this sensitive mountain landscape forever. TIWAG wants to withdraw a large part of the Ötztal water resources and pipe them through the middle of protected areas to Kaunertal, 23 kilometres away. In the process, the ecologically valuable rivers Venter and Gurgler Ache, of all places, which flow together in the Ötztaler Ache, are to be diverted. The withdrawal of up to 80 percent of the water would mean a drastic cut for the Ötztal, especially in times of climate crisis. The Ötztal is already one of the valleys with the lowest precipitation in Tyrol. The Ötztaler Ache is the lifeline of the valley - both for nature and for the population. The expansion of the Kaunertal power plant would cause it to lose most of its water volume, and valuable ecosystem services would be irreversibly lost.

At the same time, TIWAG wants to build a pumped storage power plant near the existing Gepatsch reservoir in the Kaunertal valley in order to pump the Ötztal water into the higher Platzertal valley.



In the Platzertal, a hitherto almost untouched high valley, a new dam with a height of 119 metres would be built for this purpose. That is almost the height of St. Stephen's Cathedral and seven times the height of the Golden Roof in Innsbruck. Behind this dam, 6.3 hectares of valuable moorland landscapes would sink forever into a reservoir. This massive destruction of nature not only contradicts the Alpine Convention, but also the strategy for the protection of moors recently adopted by the federal government. The last intact moors, of which there are very few left, are essential for climate protection and irreplaceable refuges for endangered animals and plants. However, years of large-scale construction sites threaten massive habitat losses for alpine biodiversity, including the golden eagle, the rock ptarmigan, edelweiss and the marmot, but also for the endangered common pintail.

We can only win the common fight against the climate and biodiversity crisis with the help of nature. In this sense, the last intact natural areas of the Alps must also be protected from further destruction. At the same time, Tyrolean politics and TIWAG must set the course for an energy turnaround that is compatible with nature instead of focusing unilaterally on the construction of new hydropower plants. The Kaunertal power plant expansion project is a negative example throughout the Alps that cannot be implemented in a way that is compatible with nature and is therefore no longer in keeping with the times. Nevertheless, TIWAG continues to push ahead with its nature-destroying project. The preparations and investigations for the approval procedure are in full swing. This project is a symbol of a misguided energy policy and an interest-driven construction policy that ignores ecological necessities.

Therefore, we, the signatories of the Kaunertal Declaration 2022, demand:

- 1.** The immediate stop of the Kaunertal power plant expansion project. Even after more than ten years of plan changes by TIWAG, the outdated large-scale project would cause massive consequential damage to people and nature. It cannot therefore be implemented in a way that is compatible with nature.
- 2.** The comprehensive protection of the last ecologically intact Alpine rivers, such as the Venter and Gurgler Ache. Only a few rivers in the Alps have been preserved in such a near-natural state, which is why they must not be further used for energy purposes, built up or diverted. The withdrawal of up to 80 percent of the water would massively affect the Ötztal, one of the valleys with the lowest precipitation in Tyrol and would seriously impair the diverse functions of the Ötztaler Ache, especially in times of climate crisis. In addition to the valuable ecosystems, the recreational function and nature tourism, as well as agricultural irrigation, would be severely affected.
- 3.** The preservation of Alpine natural landscapes such as the Platzertal as Austria's unique natural heritage.
- 4.** An energy transition that is compatible with nature, building on a holistic climate protection strategy that gives equal priority to energy-economic as well as ecological and social aspects.

Important next steps must be; reduction of consumption, increase of efficiency, a complete greening of the tax and levy system, the dismantling of environmentally harmful subsidies, a real mobility turnaround and a careful expansion of location-adapted renewable energies along nature conservation criteria. There is a great need to catch up in all these areas. In particular, photovoltaics on house roofs and façades as well as on other already built-up areas should be expanded much faster and more comprehensively.
- 5.** The rapid elimination of the burdens caused by existing hydropower plants. To this end, in particular the heavy hydropeaking on the Inn must be remediated and river habitats on the Inn must be restored.

The Kaunertal Declaration, initiated by WWF Austria, is supported by 30 organisations from the fields of environmental, nature and climate protection, fisheries and white water sports, as well as ten voices from science.



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