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"Using Oral History and Forest Management Plans to Reconstruct Traditional Non-Timber Forest Uses in the Swiss Rhone Valley (Valais) Since the Late Nineteenth Century"

Gimmi, Urs, and Matthias Buergi

Gimmi, Urs, and Matthias Buergi. "Using Oral History and Forest Management Plans to Reconstruct Traditional Non-Timber Forest Uses in the Swiss Rhone Valley (Valais) Since the Late Nineteenth Century." *Environment and History* 13, no. 2 (May, 2007): 211–246. doi:10.3197/096734007780473492 . Changes in forest use are considered as a potential key driver for recently observed changing forest dynamics in the pine forest belt of the upper Rhone valley (Canton of Valais, Switzerland). In this region, traditional non-timber forest uses, such as forest litter harvesting and wood pasture, were practised until the second half of the twentieth century. The practice of traditional non-timber forest uses led to specific environmental conditions which favoured pine as a pioneer species. With the abandonment of these practices the pine was subjected to increased competition and largely replaced by deciduous trees. In this study, the history of traditional non-timber forest uses was reconstructed by combining the analysis of forest management plans and the results from oral history interviews. The forest management plans represent the view of the forest administration whereas the narratives obtained from oral history interviews allow putting the traditional non-timber forest uses into the context of people's daily life. The different characteristics of the two source types are illustrated with two regional case studies. Different socioeconomic and political drivers were identified (changes in non-farming employment, changes in demand for forest products, access to substitute products, regulations), which led to the abandonment of traditional non-timber forest uses in the Valais. The combination of forest management plans and oral history leads to a comprehensive picture of the history and significance of traditional non-timber forest uses. The authors' findings confirm that information on traditional non-timber forest uses is crucial for an understanding of present day dynamics in the pine forest ecosystems of the Valais. All rights reserved. © 2007 The White Horse Press

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