

Invitation to the GeoRange Science Meeting

Optimising the Use of Geomatics for Mitigating Mediterranean Land Degradation

March 11/12 2004, DG JRC, Institute for Environment and Sustainability, Ispra (VA), Italy

Background and scope of the meeting

Increasing ecosystem vulnerability in Mediterranean countries is widely due to dramatic land use changes which frequently lead to an unstable state of semi-natural and agro-silvo-pastoral ecosystems, being considered rangelands in a wider sense. Large areas of Mediterranean rangelands are affected from transitional processes that cause conflicts between past and present land uses or economic and ecological priorities, and which may encompass the depletion of range resources or, in case of land abandonment, the accumulation of combustible biomass with the increasing risk of wildfires. Currently, mitigation approaches often remain confined to isolated, local areas. However, it is agreed that these problems can only be efficiently tackled if solutions are sought for larger areas, and if different, specific problem regimes are accounted for systematically, which is reflected in a large number of initiatives and policies, such as the National Action Plans called for by the UNCCD, or in research frameworks promoted by the European Commission.

During the last 3 years, the GeoRange project has worked towards an integrated approach which combines specific fields of expertise in range land ecology and management, ecosystem conservation and landscape restoration, remote sensing, spatial analysis and Geographic Information Systems (GIS), the latter frequently summarised under the term “Geomatics”. The major scope of the project has been to integrate these disciplines, in order provide enhanced Geomatics tools to assess the present state of Mediterranean rangeland resources and to evaluate the driving physical and socio-economic factors for ecosystem processes. Notwithstanding the regional dimension of the problem, GeoRange has focused its efforts on concrete case studies, covering areas of 1,000 to 3,500 sqkms. The final goal is to support the definition and implementation of multi-functional management scenarios that meet the requirements of local stakeholders and administrative authorities.

Centred around presentations on the fundamental thematic and methodological concepts and results of the GeoRange project, the meeting intends to provide a forum bringing together researchers with actors involved in the implementation of the UNCCD, to review and discuss the following issues:

- GeoRange results and land management practice – operational perspectives
- Dissemination of research results to interested stakeholders
- Options and requirements of stakeholders to extend the use of Geomatics approaches within the implementation of the UNCCD
- Implications for further research needs and alternative approaches
- Recommendations for further initiatives