

ECOLOGY AND TOURISM IN FRANCE HIT BY FOREST FIRES



A number of forest fires are ravaging hundreds of hectares of French regions - including some protected sites - which is having a negative impact on the environment, ecology, and tourism of these areas.

France's southeastern regions are suffocating from repeated forest fires. A new fire broke out in the department of "Var", leading to the evacuation of 12 000 people during the night of 26th July. Other departments are still at risk as well, such as "Bouches-du-Rhône" and "Haute-Corse", both of which have been given a yellow vigilance rating by "Météo France".

In addition to the risks faced by rescue workers and the inhabitants of these areas, as well as the total devastation of hundreds of hectares of land, **these disasters also have other, more or less direct consequences for ecology and tourism.**

Flora and Fauna Critically Affected

Ecological concerns are mainly centered on the "Trois caps" region - which comprises "Taillat, Lardier and Camarat" - near "Ramatuella", in the department of "Var". Among other things, the area is home to 100 to 150 Hermann tortoises, an endangered species. Those responsible for the site are powerless to do anything but take stock of the number of dead animals.

"We fear that, locally at least, the survival of the Hermann tortoise will be compromised," François Fouchier - the regional representative of the "Conservatoire du littoral" - explained. "We expect to find burnt tortoise shells".

The flora has also been ravaged by the fire. "We had the most beautiful Mediterranean climate forests, with three distinct species of pine - umbrella, maritime, and Aleppo - and three different species of oak - holm, white, and cork - which is quite unique," Camille Casteran explained. The area manager for the "Port-Cros" national park remarked that the region had been spared from forest fires since 1978. The municipality of "La Croix-Valmer" has been part of the "Port-Cros" national park for the last year - this is also true of "Ramatuella".

Impact on Tourism Difficult to Assess

The fires have, on occasion, struck popular tourist destinations, such as "Bormes-les-Mimosas", where 3 000 campers had to be evacuated during the night. Moreover, the municipality has called on tourists not to return to their campsites, but rather to remain on the beach.

"It's a real nightmare having a fire break out at midnight in strong wind conditions, knowing well that the water bombers will only be able to commence operations in the morning," Arizzi, the municipality's mayor, lamented.

While it is difficult to assess the direct economic repercussions of these fires, the municipalities concerned run the risk of experiencing long periods of lost earnings. "A fire is a traumatic

experience for tourists,” Roland Bruno - “Ramatuelle's” mayor - said.

At many of the sites which were ravaged by the fires, lunar landscapes have replaced natural ones, compromising future tourism seasons. “Repeated fires almost irreversibly destroy the natural heritage (referring to the spectacular repeat fires in the “Massif des Maures”),” according to comments made by the prefecture of “Var” in 2012, which also results in “economic losses that are difficult to quantify”.

While assessments are available, they are still incomplete. **“Economic losses from forest fires are often underestimated,** since only the loss of forest lands is taken into account,” a publication by the Academy of Agriculture explained, “and not the value of the non-market goods and services which these forests provide.” In Greece, the cost of forest fires “was estimated at 5 billion euros in 2017”.

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