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Gornerli reporting – the most important facts

Various false statements were published in media articles about the Gornerli project, especially on the topics of landscape protection, environmental impacts and tourism. The complexity of the project clearly leads to repeated misunderstandings. The project is described in detail on our website, and we answer the most frequently asked questions in the Dialogue section. The most important facts at a glance:

- The Gornerli project can apply for a maximum of 60% investment aid, depending on its economic viability. As of today, the project will not make the most of the investment aid because it is economically advantageous.
- The landscape in the Gornerli region is fundamentally changing because of climate change (glacier retreat, natural lake, freed up terrain). The Gornerli project will also have an impact on the landscape (larger lake, varying lake levels, dam).
- The planned dam will still allow for downhill skiing, which is an important safety aspect. Various options are currently being studied together with the Zermatt mountain guides, the Swiss Alpine Club (SAC) and the Zermatt and Monte Rosa section. The focus is on the “bypass tunnel” variant, which is around 1.5 km long in total. The secured downhill run will be provided before the dam is built. The route to the Monte Rosa hut will continue to be guaranteed via Rotenboden.
- Even without the Gornerli dam, the glacier is partially dammed by the natural lake. The construction of the dam reinforces this damming, which means that the glacier will retreat around five years faster than without the project.
- The project reduces the risks for the commune of Zermatt in the event of icefalls, debris flows or rockfalls into the lake because the dam provides protection. In the case of a natural lake, there is no possibility of containing such natural events.
- Grande Dixence keeps Zermatt mountain guides and the SAC informed about the project on an ongoing basis. A total of seven joint meetings have taken place so far, including three specific working meetings on the subject of skiers’ return journeys. There were also several joint inspections. During the last support group meeting, it was jointly agreed that Grande Dixence would analyse two alternative options requested by the mountain guides and then discuss them together.
- The existing Grande Dixence facilities operated continuously during the two Zermatt flood events in June 2024, with around 55 m³/s of water being discharged into Lake Dix, therefore preventing significantly greater damage to the Matter Vispa.
- The two floods of the Matter Vispa in June 2024 were primarily caused by the main inflows of Zmuttbach, Gornera and Findelbach. In addition to the existing Grande Dixence facilities (55 m³/s), the Gornerli dam retained around 50 to 60 m³/s and therefore prevented flood damage to the Matter Vispa. Flooding events will continue to increase in intensity and frequency due to climate change.
- The damage to the Triftbach tributary could not have been prevented by the Gornerli because it is a tributary that flows into the Matter Vispa. Protective measures are currently being planned and implemented at the Triftbach tributary by the commune of Zermatt, independently of the Gornerli project.
- The aim for Grande Dixence is not to build a reservoir that is as large as possible, but to create an optimised multi-purpose reservoir that suits the given topography, glacier retreat, future inflows and the impact on the environment and landscape. This is because the Gornerli project not only secures an additional 650 million kWh of winter electricity but also contributes to flood protection and a secure water supply.

- The realisation of the Gornerli has an impact on the landscape, the environment and tourism. It is therefore important to carefully weigh up the interests of protection and utilisation and to define suitable compensation measures. In the environmental support group, the project managers maintain a dialogue with representatives of various environmental and landscape protection organisations (WWF, Pro Natura, Aqua Viva, Mountain Wilderness, Swiss Foundation for Landscape Protection), Swiss Federation of Anglers and various tourism organisations (Zermatt mountain guides, Swiss Alpine Club, Zermatt and Monte Rosa section, commune of Zermatt). The environmental support group also includes representatives of various cantonal services.
- The project information has been presented and discussed with all stakeholders as part of the environmental support group since the beginning of 2024. Minutes are taken of the meetings and the corresponding minutes are validated in advance by all participants.
- The stakeholders of the environmental support group are deliberately already involved in the ongoing construction project so that they can play an active role in the decision-making process. The results of the parallel studies will be discussed with the participants of the support group and the results will be taken into account in the construction project if possible. Studies are made available when they are completed and validated by the project.
- As of today, around 35,000 tonnes of cement are required for the construction (approximately 180,000 m³ of concrete).
- Concrete production requires a recipe, which is currently being developed. Large quantities of gravel and sand are available at the site of the planned construction site and will therefore be extracted and processed on site.
- The logistics concept is an important component of implementation and is currently being developed. The focus is on finding a solution using existing public transport (MGB [Matterhorn Gotthard Railway]/GGB [Gornergrat Railway]) to the Findelbach station and a cableway to the building site. Heavy transport through the village is kept to a minimum but cannot be ruled out. The traffic regulations of the commune of Zermatt set out clear guidelines.