



FACTSHEET

STOP THE KAUNERTAL
POWER PLANT EXPANSION



Gepatsch reservoir in the Kaunertal valley. Image: © Sebastian Frölich

MEGA POWER PLANT PROJECT THREATENS ÖTZTAL'S RIVER GEMS

Dammed, obstructed, condemned: the energy sector puts massive pressure on our local Alpine rivers. With the expansion of the Kaunertal power plant, another mammoth project shall now be squeezed into the middle of a highly sensitive natural landscape. The water of the glacial rivers is to be diverted to end up many kilometres away in artificial reservoirs. This would mean a reduction of the Öztaler Ache river's water volume by up to 80 percent and would furthermore destroy natural dynamics. Simultaneously, the ecologically unique Platzertal in the Öztaler Alps would disappear behind a dam and would be flooded. The expansion of the Kaunertal power plant would be an ecological disaster on so many levels.

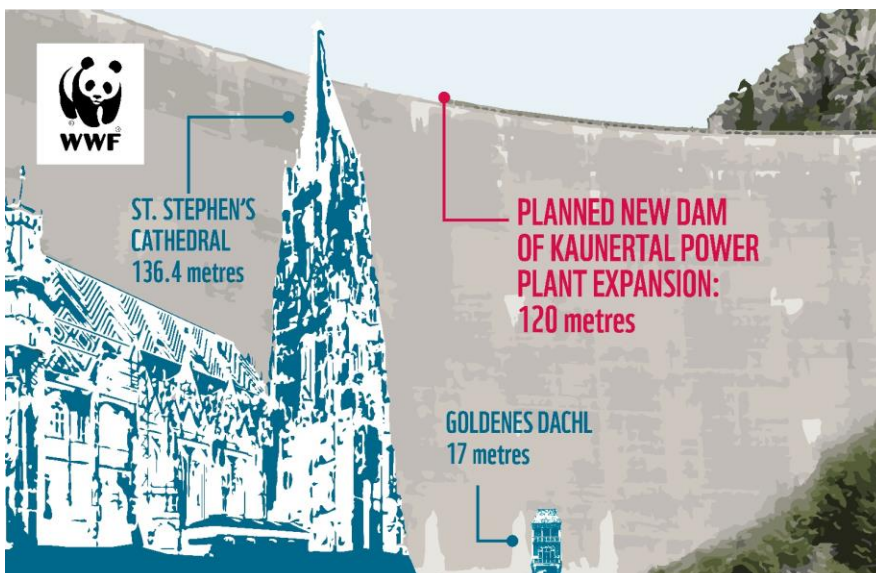


Figure: Size model of the planned new dam in the Platzertal Valley

NO TO THE KAUNERTAL POWER PLANT EXPANSION

- **Impairment of the natural water balance**
The diversion of the Verwallbach, Königsbach, Venter Ache and Gurgler Ache means that up to 80 percent less water will be available in the Öztal valley - a massive interference with natural dynamics and the entire ecosystem of the Öztaler Alps.
- **Valuable river landscapes destroyed**
The massive withdrawal of water hits precisely those rare watercourses that are still considered as being ecologically valuable. Moreover, the Venter and Gurgler Ache rivers are amongst Austria's river sanctuaries.
- **20 communities affected**
The local community would face major construction sites in the upper Tyrolian region for many years and a permanent deprivation of water – which is urgently needed for people and agriculture, especially in times of the climate crisis.
- **More harm than good**
The project serves to maximise profits – and not the pretended public interest. The massive damage to nature is not taken into consideration and counteracts a sustainable energy transition.



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Platzertal valley, Ötztaler Ache river, Venter Ache river. Images: © Christoph Praxmarer (1,2), Sebastian Frölich (3)

NATURAL HERITAGE ÖTZTALER ALPS

Majestic glaciers, lofty mountains, like the Wildspitze, roaring mountain streams: the Ötztaler Alps are home to wilderness. Here you can find the largest contiguous glacial area in the Eastern Alps. Its ice feeds a network of high mountain streams, such as the Venter and Gurgler Ache. In 1998, WWF Austria and the Ministry of the Environment designated these as so-called river sanctuaries of special conservation value. The ecologically valuable glacial rivers merge into the Ötztaler Ache river, which flows into the Inn river after 66 kilometres.

Being the Ötztal valley's lifeline, the Ötztaler Ache river provides people and nature with precious glacial water and is home to an incredible biodiversity. The river occupies a special position within the entire Eastern Alps: because its glacier-dominated flow dynamics are still largely unaffected, scientists from all over the world come to study it.

White-water paradise

The Ötztaler Ache river's rushing waters are a true natural spectacle. Locals use the river for local recreation, but also for irrigating fields. The river's wild beauty is also an important magnet for tourism – many visitors say they come because of the fantastic natural scenery.

The Ötztaler Ache river is of particular importance for rafting and kayaking: thanks to the glacier's influence, it offers white-water at all difficulty levels from May to October and is one of the internationally most important and best-known area for white-water sports.

ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION KAUNERTAL POWER STATION EXPANSION

- **Threats to biodiversity**

Due to the construction, several protected species would lose their habitats, including the rock ptarmigan, the grayling and alpine marmot. Habitat loss is the main driver of the biodiversity crisis.

- **Destruction of moors**

A new 120 m high dam would be built in the ecologically unique Platzertal valley. Behind this dam, valuable moorlands, in size equivalent to 9 football fields (6.3 ha), would disappear under the water.

- The project **threatens six important protected areas** within the region: the Natura 2000 Site Ötztaler Alpen, the Ruhegebiet area Ötztaler Alpen, the Nature Park Ötztal, the Nature Park Kaunergrat, as well as the Milser and Silzer Innauen protected wetlands.

- Due to the planned expansion, more than 4 kilometres of the Inn will be destroyed through additional **hydropeaking**. The increased hydropeaking pressure which will be put on the Inn thwarts all other efforts to implement the legally required hydropeaking rehabilitation.

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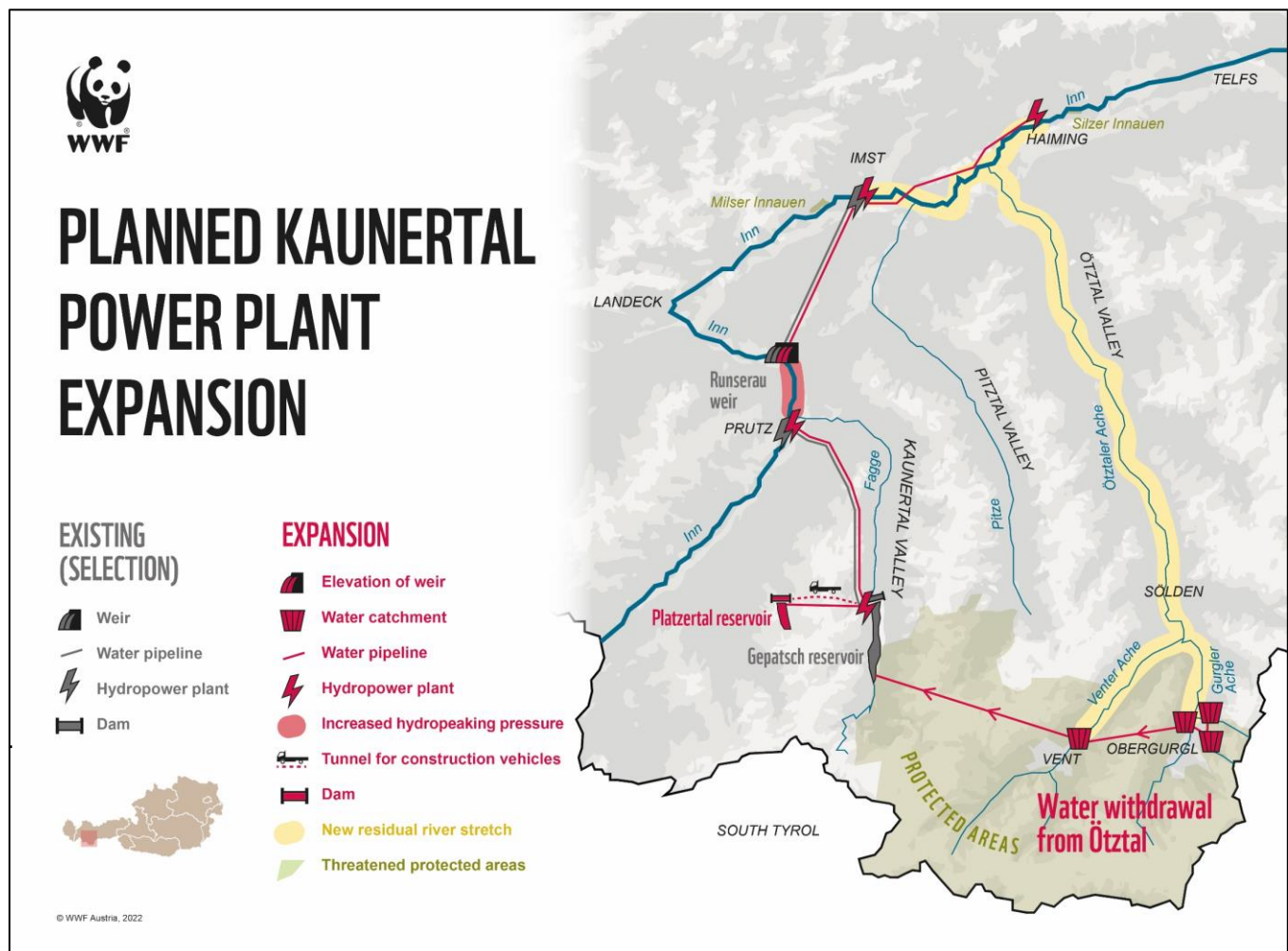
WATER RESOURCES IN JEOPARDY

The voracious hunger for profit and electricity threatens our natural river landscapes. Only recently, the Längental valley in the Stubai Alps was flooded and obstructed for another large power plant. If TIWAG's plans go ahead, the Ötztal Alps' rivers are now in danger as well. With the planned Kaunertal power plant expansion, the threat of an ecological disaster, causing immeasurable damage to people and nature is looming.

The Ötztal is one of the valleys with the lowest precipitation in Tyrol. The water-rich Öztaler Ache is important for the valley's climate and the irrigation of agriculture. The withdrawal of water by TIWAG would have serious and lasting consequences for local people. Meanwhile, residents of the Kaunertal are concerned about years of major construction sites and increased danger of landslides in the area of the existing Gepatsch reservoir. After the planned expansion, the power plant will also be operated as a pump storage facility. This would cause the water level of the Gepatsch reservoir to fluctuate more, which could increase the risk of landslides. The climate crisis and the melting of permafrost further intensify this risk.

MEGA-PROJECT FULL OF RISKS

- **Landslides at the reservoir**
The Gepatsch reservoir in the Kaunertal valley holds back 138 million cubic metres of water. Landslides from the mountain slope above the reservoir are already a regular occurrence. The melting of the permafrost and the planned new pump storage operation further exacerbates this risk.
- **Key data power plant expansion**
 - Diversion of 80% of the water from the upper Ötztal valley
 - two 25 m high concrete dams in the Venter and Gurgler Ache rivers
 - 120 m high dam in the Platzertal
 - ~ 90 km residual river stretches in total
 - 47 km tunnelling of the Alps
 - three new power plants
 - expansion of the planned hydropower plant Imst-Haiming
 - several years of major construction in four mountain valleys





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Image: © Sebastian Frölich

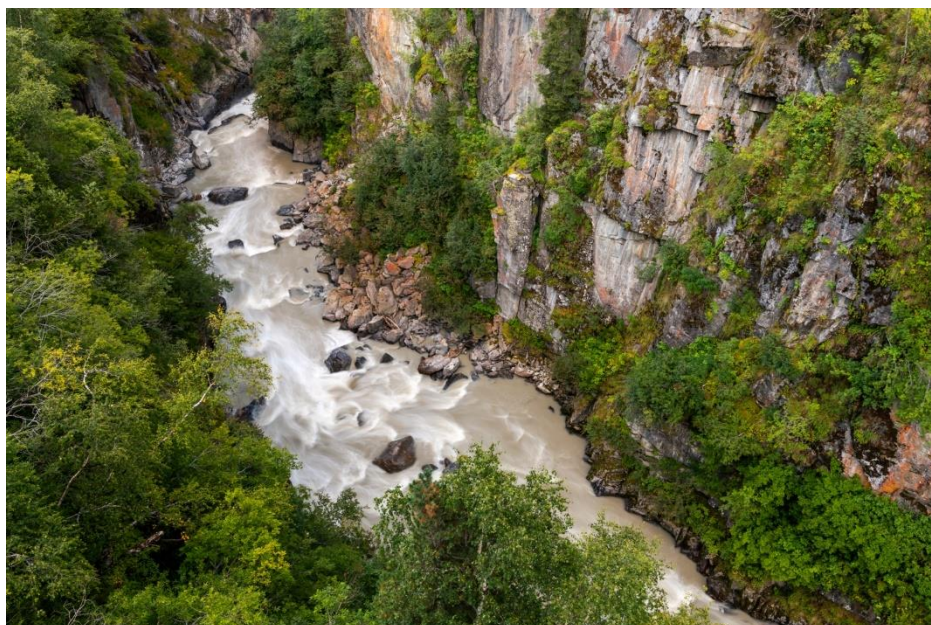
NO TO THE DESTRUCTION OF VENTER AND GURGLER ARCHE

TIWAG has been pursuing its plan to turn the Ötztal's water into profit for 15 years. But a strong opposition from the population, white-water sports enthusiasts and environmental organisations is defending the river landscape, which is worth protecting. An independent, international review commission (HSAP) scrutinised the Kaunertal expansion project in 2017. The result gave the mega-project a poor overall report card and was one of the worst audit reports ever published.

At the moment, the project to expand the Kaunertal power plant is about to undergo an official environmental impact assessment, in which the public must also participate. WWF Austria and other environmental organisations, as well as initiatives from the affected population demand:

- Protection of the Venter and Gurgler Arche
- Preservation of the Platzertal
- Stop the Kaunertal power plant expansion project
- Sustainable energy transition in Tyrol

Information and news: → www.fluessevollerleben.at/kaunertal



Venter Ache river, Image: © Sebastian Frölich

INITIATIVES AGAINST THE KAUNERTAL POWER PLANT EXPANSION

Together, we are committed to the protection of the Venter and Gurgler Arche, as well as the preservation of the Platzertal and against the Kaunertal power plant expansion.

- **Initiative Lebenswertes Kaunertal**
www.lebenswertes-kaunertal.org
- **Verein Wildwasser Erhalten Tirol - WET**
www.wet-tirol.at
- **WWF Austria**
www.wwf.at
- **Plattform „Flüsse voller Leben“**
www.fluessevollerleben.at/kaunertal



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Wir wollen die weltweite Zerstörung der Natur und Umwelt stoppen und eine Zukunft gestalten, in der Mensch und Natur in Harmonie miteinander leben.

together possible

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