

## World's 'water towers' in danger, U.N. says

Jan. 28, 01:00 EDT  
237 words  
Page A3

Tim Harper  
OTTAWA BUREAU CHIEF

OTTAWA — The source of fresh water for half the world's population is threatened by damage to mountain ecosystems, a United Nations agency warns today.

To mark the U.N. Year of Mountains, a report released today blames the problems with mountain ecosystems — home to some 600 million people — on climate change, pollution, armed conflict, population growth, deforestation and exploitation by the agricultural, mining and tourism industries. This degradation will lead to more floods, landslides and famine, the report says.

The report identifies the European Alps and the Himalaya-Karakorum-Hindu Kush chain, which stretches across northern India, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan, as the most threatened mountain ranges.

Because so much of the world's fresh water emanates from mountain ranges, the U.N. has dubbed them the "water towers of the world."

The North American Rockies are also endangered, said Carleton University professor Dr. Jack Ives, who contributed to the report.

Ski development in the Rockies continues and efforts to limit the number of persons living in Banff puts more pressure on the nearby town of Canmore, Ives said. Banff gets more than five million visitors a year.

The influx includes 20,000 vehicles a day.

"When you have large numbers of people staying in those small areas, you have enormous problems of solid waste disposal and water pollution and air pollution from the vehicles," Ives said.