



Living Waters

Conserving the source of life

Freshwater is the single most essential good for our well-being. Like a giant engine working day and night, the water cycle and inherent ecosystems are the life support of the planet. Nature's role is collector, supplier and cleaner.

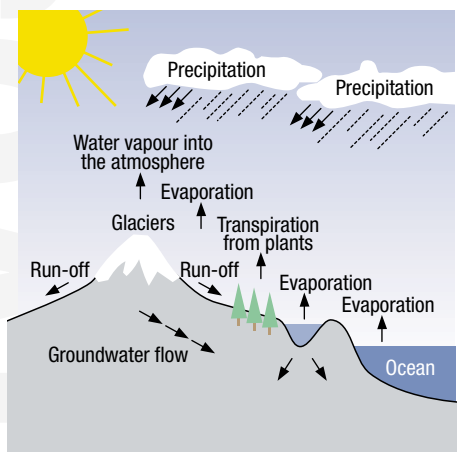
Freshwater habitats are the source of water for people and wildlife. These wetlands contain more species per area than other habitats. With freshwater wildlife declining by 50 per cent in the last 30 years, freshwater ecosystems are by far in worse condition than forest, grassland, and coastal ecosystems.

Although freshwater ecosystems occupy less than 1 per cent of the earth's surface, they deliver goods and services of enormous global value, adding up to trillions of dollars annually.

Worldwide 70 per cent of water is used for agriculture, 20 per cent for industry and 10 per cent for household uses. Water is becoming scarce not only because of increased demand, but also higher pollution levels and habitat degradation. More than 3 billion people lack access to safe water and sanitation. In developing countries, an estimated 90 per cent of wastewater is discharged directly into rivers and streams without treatment.

Freshwater is a precious resource but its future is far from secure.

Over the next ten years, WWF will champion the protection and management of 250 million hectares of freshwater wetlands, more than trebling the number of protected freshwater wetlands worldwide. WWF will also promote activities to restore at least 50 large river basins crucial to wildlife and people, as well as influence private sector practices and government policies to safeguard freshwater resources.



Our common objectives

1 Protecting and managing wetlands WWF seeks to conserve many of the most wildlife-rich wetlands on Earth. These habitats make up a life support system on which people and wildlife depend. Clean water, medicinal plants, fish and raw materials are all products of wetlands.

How? In the next four years, more than 30 million hectares of freshwater wetlands will be protected and at least 10 ecosystems and their catchments better managed.

Why? Effective management of wetlands is an investment for people and wildlife. Between 300 and 400 million people live close to – and depend on – wetlands. They vary greatly in size and character – from tiny village ponds to lakes, bogs, marshes, rivers, desert oases and the largest inland delta in the world, the Okavango Delta in Botswana that is nearly twice the size of Switzerland. These complex habitats act as giant sponges, absorbing rainfall and slowly releasing it over time. Flood control, water purification and food supply are the work of wetlands for countless people yet half of the world's wetlands have already been destroyed in the past 100 years alone. Large-scale irrigated agriculture, toxic pollutants from industrial waste and agricultural run-off pose some of the main threats to wetlands. Among threatened species are several river dolphins, manatees, fish, amphibians, birds and plants. In addition, alien 'invasive' species brought from ecosystems in foreign lands disrupt functions in native ecosystems. Africa alone spends about US\$60 million annually to control aquatic invasive species.

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② Conserving and restoring the ecological processes of rivers

WWF is working for healthy rivers as they link land and sea and support wildlife. Well-managed river basins are also vital to providing and storing water, regulating floods and sustaining fisheries.

How? International processes and government practices – including laws, water markets and river basin authorities – will reflect sound river basin management and 10 damaging infrastructure schemes to develop rivers will be halted or redirected.

Why? The combined impact of river development – including dams and dikes, disposal of wastewater, and cutting of forests – devastates the health of rivers, affecting wildlife and the food, water and raw materials needed by all. A river basin or catchment is the entire area drained by a river, including its tributaries, where the sum of activities upstream adds up to the health of habitats downstream. The ecology of rivers and lakes, and the people who live near them, depend on good water supplies and healthy populations of wildlife.

Fish usually need to migrate between oceans, rivers and lakes and need specific river banks and water conditions to thrive. More than 60 million people live in the Mekong River basin and depend on the river for water, transportation and food and one-third of China's population live in the Yangtze River basin under the threat of recurring floods. Drastic alterations of a river, for example through large dams, interrupt the flow of water and sediment, prohibit the movement of wildlife and carve up the landscape. Government subsidies to develop rivers often result in large structures built on rivers to supply energy and water. In the aftermath of costly engineering approaches, unforeseen impacts include displacement of people and loss of food source. Only laws, programmes and organisations set up to manage each river sustainably can overcome such 'death by a thousand cuts.'

③ Changing policies and practices in business and agriculture

WWF promotes efficiency through 'best practice' in the production of goods and services and for selected 'thirsty' crops.

How? Market-based mechanisms will help provide the food and products we need without harming the environment.

Why? Environmentally sustainable alternatives are available, achievable and affordable. Business activity that does not attribute financial value to ecosystem functions is unsustainable and can eventually damage natural resources and make water scarce. Artificially low water prices that are partly due to 'hidden' subsidies, lack of accountability and poor water laws lead to unnecessary wastage and pollution of water. WWF is working with producers of some water-related products to give retailers and consumers the opportunity to contribute to better water use through their daily lives. We seek to raise awareness of the opportunities for all in using water more sustainably.



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Working for a water-secure future

Freshwater ecosystems function as the lifeblood of the planet. They play a key role in WWF's mission to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment, and to build a future in which people live in harmony with nature.

Increased public and government awareness, private sector responsibility and the commitment of local groups are fundamental to achieving WWF's Living Waters vision.

The Living Waters Programme takes action so that healthy freshwater systems around the world enhance the quality of life and people value nature as the source of water.



WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by:

- conserving the world's biological diversity
- ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable
- promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.

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