

PRESS RELEASE

On World Water Day, United Nations report demonstrates role of forests and wetlands for clean water and a healthy world.

Montreal, 22 March 2010 – To mark World Water Day and highlight the linkage between biodiversity and clean water, the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), today released *Water, Wetlands and Forests: A Review of Ecological, Economic and Policy Linkages*. The report, produced in collaboration with the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and other partners, aims to foster better awareness of the crucial role that forests and wetlands play in sustaining the availability and quality of water critical for human well-being.

In our rapidly urbanizing world, clean water is a precious commodity whose economic value is greater than the money gained from clearing the forests and wetlands that provide it. The report shows that intact forests and wetlands ensure clean and reliable drinking water. Poor environmental management of these ecosystems, however, tends to result in poor water quality. Significant amounts of money are spent rectifying this problem – often through expensive water treatment infrastructure. The report provides evidence that this money is often more effectively spent by restoring the ability of the natural environment to fix the problem for us.

New York City, for example, was faced with spending between US\$ 4-6 billion for filtration of water from the Catskill/Delaware watershed. Instead, the city chose to support an integrated water resource management approach to the watershed, which ensured clean water at an approximate cost of US\$ 1 billion.

Most people recognize the importance of safe drinking water. Water supply is high on the public political agenda. A recent survey even suggested that drinking water is the number one environmental concern of Americans; with 59% saying they worry “a great deal” about the issue, versus just 34% that worry about climate change.

But many citizens of rich nations take water for granted. Few people stop to think where it comes from and the role that biodiversity plays in supplying it.

Water use is growing at more than twice the rate of population growth, thus it is vital that we understand the linkages between water, wetlands and forests, and manage our ecosystems accordingly. Inland waters are the most threatened ecosystem type of all. Over half of the world’s wetlands have been lost since 1900. Deforestation also poses a major threat to the quantity and quality of fresh water.

Recent trends in water availability and its quality give significant cause for alarm. More than one in six people worldwide still do not have access to safe drinking water. Estimates suggest that by 2025 two thirds of the world’s population will be living in areas of high water stress, with some 1.8 billion people living in regions with absolute water scarcity.

Key messages of the report include:

- About a third of the world's largest cities obtain a significant portion of their drinking-water supply directly from forested protected areas;
- Water, wetlands and forests interact to produce healthy and productive ecosystems. Forests and wetlands help capture and store water to mitigate floods in periods of heavy rain and ensure steady water flow during drier seasons. Many forests depend on groundwater for survival, and rely on wetlands to replenish this. No clear boundaries exist between these ecosystems – in fact many of our forests are located in wetlands;
- There are several crucial economic linkages. For example, the water-regulation functions of forests add significantly to their value, and these values can exceed those for timber, tourism and carbon storage combined;
- Forest and wetland mismanagement can adversely impact water quality and biodiversity. Hence, it is imperative that policy makers consider ecosystems in their entirety to properly account for the impacts that management and practices will have throughout the ecosystem;
- Forests regulate soil erosion and pollution, preventing desertification and salinization.

Ahmed Djoghlaif, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, said, “The linkages between water, wetlands and forests are one example that demonstrates the importance of managing ecosystems in their entirety. This is not only to protect their ecological character but also the freshwater resources and related ecological services that are so vital to human activity on Earth. This publication provides useful information on this topic and will encourage further and strengthened cooperation between the multitudes of stakeholders involved in protecting our planet’s freshwater resources and its interdependent ecosystems.”

The report is geared towards enabling policy makers to be more aware of these ecosystems when formulating policies and management practices for water supply, supplements.

World Water Day is being celebrated under the theme of Clean Water for a Healthy World. This theme is intimately linked with year-long celebrations of the International Year of Biodiversity (IYB), which calls upon citizens to reflect on the role of biodiversity in providing for human well-being. During the IYB, the 65th session of the United Nations General Assembly will hold a high level session on biodiversity.

CBD Technical Series No. 47, *Water, Wetlands and Forests: A Review of Ecological, Economic and Policy Linkages* is available at www.cbd.int/ts.

Note to Editors

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

Opened for signature at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and entering into force in December 1993, the Convention on Biological Diversity is an international treaty for the conservation of biodiversity, the sustainable use of the components of biodiversity and the equitable sharing of the benefits derived from the use of genetic resources. With 193 Parties, the Convention has near universal participation among countries. The Convention seeks to address all threats to biodiversity and ecosystem services, including threats from climate change, through scientific assessments, the development of tools, incentives and processes, the transfer of technologies and good practices and the full and active involvement of relevant stakeholders including indigenous and local communities, youth, NGOs, women and the business community. The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, a supplementary treaty to the Convention, seeks to protect biological diversity from the potential risks posed by *living modified organisms* resulting from modern biotechnology. To date, 156 countries and the European Union are party to the Protocol. The Secretariat of the Convention and its Cartagena Protocol is located in Montreal. For more information visit www.cbd.int www.cbd.int/2010

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