



The Alliance for Water Stewardship

The facts about water these days are sobering. Nearly two billion people lack access to clean water for drinking or sanitation, yet many of the rivers and lakes that sustain us are polluted or running dry. Scientists know that many freshwater species are in serious decline or are disappearing altogether. And current demand for water from cities, agriculture, and industry is already unsustainable in many regions, yet is projected to increase significantly in coming years.

For human society to continue to grow and prosper, we must dramatically improve our “stewardship” of the world’s freshwater resources.—how we handle and manage all of the voluntary aspects of our impacts on and use of water. The time has come to achieve a balance between meeting our needs today while preserving nature’s ability to provide our water needs over the long term.

In the next few years, we must agree on and undertake actions that will improve management of our water resources. Efforts to address this challenging global issue are

undermined by the fact that no common water stewardship standards exist. These standards are needed to define how to develop and manage water in a way that enables social and economic development while ensuring environmental sustainability.

A new approach to water management

In response to this challenge, the Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) has been formed. The AWS, working with engaged stakeholders from around the world, is providing a global platform for both the development of a water stewardship system and the permanent organization to house the system. At the heart of the work being organized by AWS is the development of standards and a certification program. We need to create a program that recognizes and rewards water users and managers who take major steps to minimize their water use and impacts. When up and running, the AWS’s program will provide a powerful new incentive to improve the way water is managed around the world

through rigorous yet realistic water stewardship standards.

AWS is creating an independent, international long-term organization. It will house standards, oversee any certification component that is created, and will administer a branding and marketing system that recognizes and rewards successful water stewards around the world. Water managers and users will be provided with a clear roadmap and the necessary guidance to improve operations and procedures so as to meet new standards of water stewardship.

An open forum

For the program’s standards to address fully the complex nature of the water issues facing us, it is critical that all stakeholders—social, commercial, public, and environmental—work together to achieve agreement on the development of a new, viable voluntary approach to water stewardship. To this end, AWS has been developing an inclusive, open platform—a multi-year global water roundtable will be launched in the next three to five



The mission of the Alliance for Water Stewardship is to promote responsible use of fresh water that is both socially beneficial and environmentally sustainable.



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months. Existing and new regional initiatives will interact extensively with the global water roundtable, so that both the global and regional aspects of a new international water stewardship program are developed simultaneously. This will enable international and multi-regional collaboration in a manner that has the potential to be truly transformative. It will stimulate a new global ethic in regard to the use of fresh water, and will stand beside regulatory processes that currently govern water issues in many parts of the world.

Communities, organizations and industries around the world now recognize clearly the value of stewardship (or certification) efforts involving voluntary participants. Participants in other international stewardship or certification programs already in effect are able to establish transparency and accountability for their activities that go beyond mere regulatory compliance. Through their participation they also demonstrate a clear consideration of social and environmental impacts.

A growing collaboration

As of this year's World Water Week in Stockholm (August 2009), the "organizers" or "facilitators" of the AWS effort include entities that represent a wide range of business, conservation, social and water utility interests. Involved in the effort to date are the two largest international conservation organizations in the world—The Nature Conservancy and WWF; Also involved are the Water Stewardship Initiative, a business venture operated out of

Australia and supported by a wide range of water stakeholders; Water Witness International, a social-equity organization operating in the U.K. and Africa; the Water Environment Federation, a non-profit educational organization for water professionals; the Pacific Institute, a non-profit social and environmental research organization specializing in sustainable water management issues; and the European Water Partnership, a non-profit organization initiating and coordinating activities to achieve the Water Vision for Europe—2030.

In the coming months, AWS will start the global water roundtable process, will establish new regional initiatives while further aligning with the path-breaking regional water stewardship work already underway by WSI in Australia and EWP in Europe, will solicit AWS sponsors to support the AWS itself, and will continue to help recruit major underwriters of both the roundtable and regional initiatives.

Active, sustained stakeholder engagement will be the key to all of the AWS's upcoming work; it needs to reflect as fully as possible the different geographic, social, economic, and environmental perspectives of the water issues facing us. Participation in AWS work is open to all, and stakeholder outreach and engagement will be involved in every aspect of the design, development, and implementation of the world's first international water stewardship program.

Be part of it!

The Alliance's work is just beginning. Join us in a collaborative, stakeholder-driven process to change how the world manages and uses our water resources. Working together, we can establish an international water stewardship program available to large-scale water users and providers, and that will be an important tool to help protect freshwater ecosystems and secure our water supplies for the future.

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