

How Could Water Stewardship Standard(s) Work?

The Alliance for Water Stewardship's Model for Change

The Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) proposes that significant benefits can be gained by civil society organizations, public sector agencies, businesses & water service providers if water can be managed sustainably at the watershed¹ level. How could water stewardship standard(s) deliver such benefits to these stakeholder groups?

This is the AWS's model for change. The model builds on work that has been carried out by the Water Stewardship Initiative (WSI) in Australia and the European Water Partnership (EWP) in Europe since 2007. The model clarifies the logic and key initial assumptions of AWS's approach.

If accepted, the model provides the guiding framework for water stewardship standard(s) to be developed through a global multi-stakeholder process. It is, therefore, important that the model is scrutinized, understood, discussed and, if necessary, modified at the outset of the standard(s) development process.

The key elements of the model are that:

- Unsustainable use and unsustainable management of water at the watershed level have negative social, environmental, cultural and economic **impacts** that are of great concern to many different stakeholders. These negative impacts are inter-related and are associated with costs and risks for different stakeholder groups.
- Many of these impacts can be addressed effectively by focusing on improvement in relation to **four key target areas at the watershed level**: improved water flow regime², improved water quality, equitable and effective governance, and the protection of high conservation value habitats³. Achieving improvement at the watershed level in these four key areas is an effective way to reduce negative impacts, and reduce the associated costs and risks.
- There are a range of highly effective **management actions** that managers of individual businesses can take which can make a major contribution to improvement in these key watershed level targets.

¹ "watershed" is defined as "the drainage area of a stream, river or lake." The term 'watershed' is considered to be synonymous with the terms 'catchment area' and 'river basin' (ref FAO Aquastat website, sourced from UNESCO/WMO, International glossary of hydrology, 2d edition, 1992).

² "Water flow regime" is defined as "the pattern of variation in water flows and levels through rivers, wetlands, lakes and groundwater within a catchment over time." (from EWP and WSI draft standards).

³ The concept of "high conservation value" habitats is defined as "wetland, lake or riparian areas that are, or whose management has a critical influence on: a) globally, regionally or nationally significant concentrations of rare, threatened or endangered species; b) rare, threatened or endangered ecosystems; c) the provision of basic services of nature in critical situations (e.g. watershed protection, erosion control); d) meeting the basic needs of local communities (e.g. subsistence, health) and/or critical to local communities' traditional cultural identity (areas of cultural, ecological, economic or religious significance identified in cooperation with such local communities)."

- **Water stewardship standard(s)** based on sound science and developed with the involvement of businesses, water service providers, civil society organizations and public sector agencies will identify those actions that will be most effective in meeting the watershed level targets.
- Uptake of such standard(s) by businesses and water service providers participating in the water stewardship program will, consequently, reduce such negative impacts and **provide a range of benefits to civil society and public sector agencies**. It will contribute to the social and environmental goals of civil society organizations. It will contribute to the achievement of policy goals for public sector agencies.
- The provision of these benefits means that businesses and water service providers who participate in the water stewardship program **deserve the support and encouragement for their efforts from civil society organizations and public sector agencies**. This creates market opportunities for participants, and encourages higher levels of uptake leading to further positive social, environmental and policy results.
- **Uptake of the standard(s) will also generate direct internal benefits for participating businesses** and water service providers, through efficiency savings, and more reliable supplies of water for economic use.
- Uptake of the standard(s) will generate benefits even when uptake is by only one business in a particular watershed. However, the benefits for individual businesses and other stakeholders will be cumulatively greater when many businesses within the same watershed take up the standard(s).
- Widespread uptake of water stewardship standard(s) by businesses and water service providers, rewarded by direct internal benefits as well as the active support of civil society organizations and public sector agencies will drive positive social, environmental, and economic change worldwide.

The main elements of this model are illustrated in the figure below:

