

ALLIANCE FOR WATER STEWARDSHIP



For years now alarms have been sounding to alert us that human usage of freshwater resources is unsustainable. Growing levels of demand coupled with rising incidence of droughts and floods have created the urgent need to find new ways to protect and preserve our freshwater resources and so sustain the ecosystems that depend on them for survival.

What must be done?

Key players within the global water community, including governments, non-governmental organizations, multinational corporations, and others, agree that collaboration and a unified approach is our only hope to solving the issue of freshwater sustainability.

What we need is a truly global way to unite and guide everyone with a stake in the use and stewardship of Earth's freshwater resources. The practical challenge is to harness different efforts and viewpoints within a cohesive, consensus-oriented approach that will quickly gain global recognition and support. This e-letter is the joint effort of The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the Pacific Institute, and the Water Stewardship Initiative (WSI).

Having begun along parallel but separate pathways, we are now working together to define core principles and structures needed to develop an inclusive global freshwater stewardship scheme. We envision a process of delineating the voluntary standards that will bear the weight of significant global consensus in driving responsible freshwater stewardship.

Our formal collaboration started earlier this year, and one of our most important tasks is to understand what has already been done and what additional perspectives need to be embraced in order for such a scheme to become a global reality. To that end, and recognizing that a truly global effort will ultimately require many more collaborators, we invite you to reply to this e-mail as a way of registering your interest in becoming a part of our growing freshwater stewardship network.

allianceforwaterstewardship.org

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The Nature Conservancy: Partnering to protect the world's watersheds

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) believes that healthy, thriving freshwater ecosystems are a precondition for meeting human needs for freshwater, and that there is a basic, fundamental compatibility to human and biological freshwater needs. Water is a vital environmental, social, and economic asset; human needs for water must be met in harmony with environmental needs to ensure long-term sustainability.

This means managing water in a way that protects the natural world. Several years ago, TNC began conceptualizing a freshwater stewardship scheme as an important tool to protect freshwater resources, with TNC serving merely as a catalyst for the exploration of ideas about a freshwater sustainability certification program. In late 2006, TNC facilitated a roundtable meeting with more than 50 water experts that included leaders from the drinking water community, local governments, sustainability and certification programs, NGOs, and other water community stakeholders.

The roundtable results were positive but challenging: participants applauded the concept of a freshwater sustainability certification effort, but stated that establishing such an effort globally would require extensive outreach, partnership, and collaborative efforts. TNC is pleased to have now entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with WSI and the Pacific Institute and looks forward to engaging with many others in working together to sustain our freshwater ecosystems for the benefit of all life on Earth.

The Pacific Institute: Reaching consensus on sustainable water management

With water resources around the globe threatened by climate change, misuse, and pollution, a new way of thinking about freshwater is needed. There are workable, emerging practices in sustainable water management on both the user and provider sides of the equation. A freshwater stewardship scheme provides the opportunity to reach broad consensus on, and concretely delineate, what responsible water management looks like.

For over two decades the Pacific Institute has been conducting extensive research on this issue, using science, economics, and consensus-building to create analytical tools and practical solutions that take issues out of the realm of ideology and into the real world. Science shows that people's needs for water can be met while protecting the environment when innovative water efficiency and conservation strategies, community-scale projects, smart economics, and new technology are put to use.

The key is in implementation, and voluntary international standards can help guide on-the-ground action. The Pacific Institute's longstanding work on standards development demonstrates that social and environmental standards provide organizations with practical guidance that can drive better performance. Aligning commercial decisions with community values empowers citizens and investors. Reaching a shared understanding of best practices in water management will identify and reward those actors who are doing their part to sustainably manage our most precious resource.

The Water Stewardship Initiative: Multi-stakeholder stewardship

WSI has emerged in response to Australia's urgent need for better definition and recognition of socially, economically, and environmentally responsible freshwater usage. The initiative has been supported by Landcare Australia and the Australian Government's National Water Commission, along with a wide range of commercial sponsors. After two years of working through a multi-stakeholder engagement process to develop a water stewardship scheme for Australia, WSI has so far proposed the basic outlines of a scheme and convened two stakeholder forums to gauge support and gather feedback.

More recent work has focused on reviewing existing standards and approaches from a wide variety of stewardship and 'eco-label' schemes, as the basis for further development of draft water stewardship principles and criteria.

The goal for 2008 is to extend an options paper to review potential approaches to governance, verification, and branding, and to hold the third Water Stewardship Forum. Global organizations consistently stress the importance of a scheme that can be easily adopted on a worldwide scale.

WSI has thus sought out partners in all global regions, leading to a Memorandum of Understanding with TNC and the Pacific Institute. We look forward to forging new connections with other organizations around the world to further collaborate in the development of a global water stewardship scheme.