

19th World Lake Conference
7-9 November 2023, Balatonfüred, Hungary

Beyond Lakes: Linking Science, Culture and Governance for their Sustainable Use
BALATON DECLARATION

PREAMBLE

Freshwater is our most important natural resource, being essential for human health, well-being, and socioeconomic development, as well as for facilitating biodiversity and the myriad of life-supporting ecosystem services upon which humanity depends. Only about 1% of all the freshwater on the Earth's surface exists in liquid form; however, more than 90% of this total is contained in lakes, wetlands and other standing bodies of water. At the same time, while our ability to develop and utilize water resources has advanced significantly globally over time, our ability to manage natural and artificial lakes, their basins, and their ecosystem services for sustainable use has lagged far behind, even as increasing freshwater demands are occurring alongside continuing exploitation and degradation of lakes. Many national approaches to freshwater policies, for example, are fragmented, with their goals not being achieved because of such factors as insufficient funding, slow implementation activities and insufficient integration of environmental objectives into sectoral policies. A sustainable freshwater management approach also has implications for achieving many Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Water Action Agenda, an example being SDG 6.6, which calls for the protection and restoration of water-related ecosystems.

National governments recognized this reality with their unanimous adoption of a Resolution on Sustainable Lake Management (SLM) at the 5th Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly on 2 March 2022, consistent with the global sustainability agenda. Furthermore, this 19th World Lake Conference, *Beyond Lakes: Linking Science, Culture and Governance for Their Sustainable Use*, was designed, among other reasons, to extend the range of lake degradation issues previously highlighted at the 3rd World Lake Conference in Keszthely, Hungary, including eutrophication, toxic substances, rehabilitation approaches and stakeholder roles, by presenting many valuable tools and concepts for maintaining the wide range of life-supporting ecosystem services provided by lakes and their basins, as well as other interconnected ecosystems. This 19th World Lake Conference also is the first global-scale lake-focused conference convened since the unanimous adoption of the SLM Resolution, thereby representing an invaluable opportunity to highlight the critical challenges and goals inherent in the sustainable management of lakes and their basins, including their linkages to climate change and the related extreme climatic events (droughts, floods) that have significantly impacted both aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems globally, highlighting the need for integrated climate planning in lake regions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Accordingly, we, the participants at the 19th World Lake Conference, make the following recommendations to advance the sustainable management of lakes, their basins, and their ecosystem services for present and future generations, consistent with the goals outlined in the SLM Resolution.

Specific Proposal:

Accelerate and enhance support for the forerunner national governments and concerned national and international non-governmental organizations to realize the designation of a “World Lake Day” at the United Nations General Assembly. Designation of a “World Lake Day” will enormously contribute to

bringing global attention to the crucial role of lakes in addressing human freshwater needs, and ecosystem integrity and biodiversity, at all levels.

General Recommendations:

In addition, the participants agreed on the importance of striving to:

- Develop a cooperative global program of assessment dedicated to lakes and their basins, tentatively called the Global Lake Assessment Programme (GLAP), that provides a periodic global overview of their status, use and management that can complement existing global programs targeted to water as a whole, such as the World Water Assessment Programme (WWAP) and the World Water Quality Assessment (WWQA);
- Create and ensure implementation of tools to strengthen science-policy linkages in developing sustainable lake management efforts, including the involvement of policymakers, scientists, and communities, a noteworthy example being the Mother Lake Goals, inspired by the SDGs, for the conservation and sustainable management of the Lake Biwa basin, Japan; and
- Establish a long-term global lake coalition with measurable and achievable goals to unify and expand the synergy of the range of existing United Nations, governmental, non-governmental, research, and community lake-related organizations at the regional, national and local levels.

Additional considerations and actions to enhance the benefits to be realized from the implementation of the SLM Resolution can include the following:

- Consolidate and coordinate the authority and responsibility for lake basin management to the maximum extent in order to reduce the policy fragmentation currently hindering sustainable management of lakes and other lentic freshwater systems;
- Ensure the application and interpretation of guidelines and protocols, even if they may differ in meeting their distinct and specific purposes, are consistent in regard to assessing and interpreting signs of lakes and lake basin improvements, including the scientific, institutional, policy, and cultural components;
- Develop and implement Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) plans and programs in lake regions, taking into account their past on-the-ground adaptation experiences to climate-driven extreme water events;
- Recognize that many lake-related hydrological extremes, such as lake water level changes, may occur as a result of external forces that require consideration within the development of sustainable lake basin management efforts;
- Because the more comprehensive ecological and social benefits of lake basin management are often not appropriately considered in national development plans and programs, recognize that sustainable lake management efforts to protect lakes and their essential ecosystem services, as well as to restore degraded ones, should be viewed as an investment both in the present and in the future, rather than as a cost;
- Emphasize that the Integrated Lake Basin Management (ILBM) approach can serve as a powerful tool to facilitate achievement of the SLM goals as a lake-focused Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) framework, featuring the gradual, incremental and long-term improvement of lake basin governance;
- Adopt communication strategies to facilitate effective outreach and communication at all levels, including social media, community engagement, and cross-disciplinary education, to inform sustainable lake management by policymakers and lake basin communities;
- Enhance proactive lake management by policymakers, the public, and all relevant lake stakeholders to address lake basin management challenges through the preparation of regular assessment reports on the status and needed actions of in understandable language used to address activities such as the implementation of the SLM Resolution at the regional, national and local levels;

- Promote and enhance the level of citizen science, as well as individual and community lake stakeholder involvement, to facilitate community ownership, including indigenous communities, of lake management efforts, ensuring their needs and considerations are incorporated into decision-making processes;
- Mobilize the enthusiasm, energy, and visions of the Youth in facilitating sustainable lake management at all levels, including planning, decision-making, implementation, evaluation and celebration;
- Ensure wide dissemination and training related to evidence-based solutions from successful case studies of sustainable lake basin management to all relevant stakeholders, including policymakers, scientists, NGOs, and lake communities, as a means to facilitate successful management efforts in other lake basins;
- Explore relevant principles and experiences of ongoing and anticipated EU water-related activities relevant to SLM implementation, such as the EU Blue, ESPON Thematic Area Plans and Water Management Functional Areas, and recommendations arising from the Budapest Water Summits;
- Provision of adequate funding at local, regional, national and regional levels to support implementation of the SLM Resolution and its aims, combining public investments with private and innovative financing, including development of a World Lake Fund;
- Place greater emphasis on the Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) approach as a means for funding large-scale restoration and sustainable management of lakes and wetlands;
- Recognize glacial lake outburst floods (GLOF) as an emerging new challenge in addressing the sustainable management of high-altitude lakes.

As noted in the World Lake Vision, experiences around the world suggest that if we are able to use lakes, their basins and their wide range of ecosystem services in a sustainable and responsible manner, there is much hope we can meet the needs of the human and natural communities that depend on them for clean and sustainable freshwater resources, the key to life.