

14TH World Lake Conference
31 October – 4 November, 2011, Austin, Texas

Lakes, Rivers, Groundwater and Coastal Areas: Understanding Linkages

AUSTIN DECLARATION

Water is shared by all life, unifying all living organisms, and our planet contains a finite quantity of this precious resource. What has changed over time is the quantity of water we use, and the many ways we use it to address the growing water needs of an increasing population, urbanization, industrialization and food production. This has resulted in modification of our natural water courses, and overexploitation and degradation of water systems throughout the world. More recent global phenomena, such as climate change and related extreme climatic events (droughts, floods), also have impacted both aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. These stresses have resulted in the degradation of many life-supporting services provided by ecosystems, being expressed in the form of environmental degradation, increased human health impacts, decreased food security and lost economic development opportunities. Our planet now has more than 7 billion people to sustain, a situation unprecedented in human history, with equally unprecedented demands on freshwater ecosystems, their resources and their services to humanity.

Accordingly, the participants at the 14th World Lake Conference, 31 October to 4 November, 2011, in Austin, Texas, USA:

Acknowledging that freshwater is fundamental for all life, being finite in quantity, unevenly distributed around the world, sensitive to human activities, and irreplaceable in its many uses;

Deeply concerned over the unprecedented negative impacts on aquatic ecosystems from human activities, including possible irreversible changes with negative implications for economic and social development, and the sustainability of aquatic ecosystems, their basins, their resources and their services;

Aware that most liquid freshwater on our planet's surface at any given instant is in lakes, both natural and artificial (reservoirs), which contain more than 90% of this freshwater, that they provide the greatest range of ecosystem services to humanity, and that they are fundamentally interlinked with other lake, river, groundwater and coastal water systems;

Conscious of the fact that the hydrologic linkages between flowing (lotic) and pooled (lentic) water systems fundamentally influence the availability and nature of all water systems;

Recognizing the value of comprehensive approaches such as Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) in advancing the notion of an integrated approach to managing water resources, and wishing to advance this approach by due consideration of the governance elements fundamental to managing freshwater systems for sustainable use; and

Acknowledging that, although progress in water resources management has been made since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, substantial governance, capacity and financial deficiencies remain as fundamental issues to be addressed at all governmental levels;

The Participants Recommend:

- That Governments, NGOs, civil society, industry and agriculture strive for practical, participatory approaches for managing lakes, reservoirs, wetlands, rivers, groundwater, coastal and other water systems for sustainable use, and for enhancing human and ecosystem health, including due consideration of the potential impacts of climate change and extreme water-related events such as drought and floods;
- That full consideration of the hydrologic linkages between flowing and pooled freshwater systems, as exemplified in the Integrated Lake Basin Management (ILBM) approach promulgated by the International Lake Environment Committee (ILEC), is deemed essential for effective water system management;
- That maintaining the ecosystem services provided by water systems be considered an essential component of water management efforts, with particular attention directed to the regulating services that underpin the provisioning and cultural services utilized by humanity;
- That efforts are made to educate and inform water users and stakeholders at all levels, including women and youth, of their impacts on aquatic ecosystems, and also of their potential roles in facilitating both ecosystem health and sustainable development;
- That integrated water management approaches be undertaken through gradual, continuous and holistic improvement of basin governance, including sustained efforts directed to integrating institutional responsibilities, policy directions, stakeholder participation, scientific and traditional knowledge, technological possibilities and funding prospects and constraints;
- That management of freshwater systems, whether flowing or pooled, be recognized as a continuing effort comprising assessment, action, evaluation and revision over time, rather than being considered as a single program or action;
- That Governments and water stakeholders at all levels recognize that continuous and adequate financial support, as well as appropriate technical and governance capacity, are essential and continuing requirements for managing freshwater systems for sustainable use;
- That Governments use past experiences and lessons learned in a wide range of environmental and socioeconomic settings, particularly the daunting challenges hindering sustainable water resources, as exemplified in the current unprecedented drought in Texas and the Southwestern United States, to guide development and implementation of integrated water management actions and programs for addressing freshwater goals, including due and appropriate consideration of the hydrologic linkages between water systems, and their scientific, socioeconomic and governance implications;
- That Governments, NGOs and civil society strive to propel the principles and linked scientific and governance components of integrated water management, as exemplified in the ILBM approach, into mainstream discussions in the global water dialogue, and as a component to be considered in the RIO+20 discussions and deliberations.

The participants make these recommendations with a view to advancing the management of lakes, reservoirs, rivers, groundwater and coastal water systems, and their environmental and governance interlinkages, to meet human needs and maintain aquatic ecosystems and their services for present and future generations.