

# **The World Lake Vision: A Call to Action**

*In the century that lies ahead, humanity faces the challenge of developing a civilization fit for a finite planet and one equipped to deal with a mounting scarcity of essential resources such as freshwater. The world's lakes, which are a primary source and storehouse of the world's easily-accessible freshwater, will be a critical arena in this great transition to a society which sustains itself without degrading and depleting its own natural foundation. Many of these lakes are already in jeopardy. The World Lake Vision aims to illuminate this growing crisis, to articulate principles to guide this transition toward managing lakes for their sustainable use, and to provide a practical blueprint for insuring the long-term health of lakes and the integrity of the freshwater required by human societies for their survival and economic development, and for maintaining life-supporting ecosystems.....*

It is difficult to overstate the urgency of the problems confronting the world's lakes, which hold more than 90 percent of all the liquid freshwater on our planet's surface. Many of the world's most important lakes are in crisis, beset by a myriad of problems that affect the quantity and quality of the water they contain, the organisms they support, and their ability to meet the water needs of the surrounding human populations. Some suffer from excessive water withdrawals and diversions, while others have witnessed deteriorating water quality because of polluting human activities on the surrounding land. In recent decades, problems originating even beyond the immediate lake basin-- notably acid rain and climate change-- have added additional burdens to already stressed lake ecosystems.

Despite clear evidence of an escalating crisis, most lakes still lack the kind of well-conceived, integrated plan needed to manage them in a way that both insures their health and supports human water needs over the long term. Current lake management and conservation efforts typically fail because their approach is too narrowly-focused and fragmented. The *World Lake Vision* responds to the need for practical guidance by offering a comprehensive framework for tackling the daunting lake management challenges that confront us. While this document may prove helpful to a variety of audiences, it aims first and foremost to assist the efforts of citizens around the world who inhabit lake basins.

At the moment the number of severely-degraded lakes is relatively small, but the catastrophic demise of the Aral Sea in southcentral Asia, which is literally disappearing because of the diversion of the rivers that replenished its waters, looms as a warning sign. In the absence of a holistic, integrated approach to pollution prevention and sustainable use, many lakes and the communities that depend upon them may face equally dire fates in



the foreseeable future. This would represent a loss far beyond their value as sources of freshwater, food, and recreation. Lakes are also places of great beauty and biological complexity, which have served as cradles of culture and landscapes of human history.

The *World Lake Vision* provides a set of guiding principles for developing and implementing effective management programs for the world's lakes. These principles augment those already articulated in the World Water Vision, but focus specifically on lakes, their unique characteristics and uses, and the threats they face. It also describes promising strategies to address these threats, which individuals and organizations working at the local, national, and global level can undertake over the longer term.



The Precautionary Principle must be the departure point for such efforts. This political decision-making approach emphasizes that communities and governments should not use the lack of full scientific certainty as a reason to postpone action to prevent serious and irreversible environmental damage, to which lakes are especially vulnerable. The *World Lake Vision* also incorporates the Dublin Principles for managing freshwater resources, emphasizing the importance of public participation in water development and management efforts, including the central role of women in these matters.



The seven principles detailed in *World Lake Vision* provide a road map for achieving the transition to managing lakes for their sustainable use.

*Principle 1: A harmonious relationship between humans and nature is essential for the sustainability of lakes.*

*Principle 2: A lake drainage basin is the logical starting point for planning and management actions for sustainable lake use.*

*Principle 3: A long-term, proactive approach directed to preventing the causes of lake degradation is essential.*

*Principle 4: Policy development and decision making for lake management should be based on sound science and the best available information.*

*Principle 5: The management of lakes for their sustainable use requires the resolution of conflicts among competing users of lake resources, taking into account the needs of present and future generations and of nature.*

*Principle 6: Citizens and other stakeholders must participate meaningfully in identifying and resolving critical lake problems.*

*Principle 7: Good governance, based on fairness, transparency and empowerment of all stakeholders, is essential for sustainable lake use.*

***The World Lake Vision is above all a call to action.*** The key to the sustainable use of our lakes lies in finding a balance between the water needs of humanity, and the ability of nature to meet these water needs over the long term. This document identifies a wide range of actions and strategies to assist lake communities, decision-makers and others with a stake in lake resources to develop individual lake visions to guide their sustainable use. Indeed, if we are able to use lakes 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 freshwater resources, the key to life.

