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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

**MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION
ON THE PROTECTION AND USE OF TRANSBOUNDARY
WATERCOURSES AND INTERNATIONAL LAKES**

INFORMATION NOTICE

**SEMINAR ON ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES AND FINANCING FOR THE
PROTECTION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF ECOSYSTEMS**

(Geneva, 10-11 October 2005)

Introduction

1. The role of ecosystems in water management, such as forests, soils and wetlands, which capture, filter, store and distribute water, and mitigate floods, has been increasingly recognized and actions to protect and restore these ecosystem have been initiated at the global, regional, national and local levels.
2. For example, the recently published Millennium Ecosystem Assessment has highlighted the consequences of ecosystem change for human well-being and options for responding to those changes, and has put numbers on the value of individual ecosystems and the services they provide. It also revealed that the degradation of ecosystems together with their services could grow significantly worse during the first half of this century and become a barrier to achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals.
3. Moreover, the thirteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development adopted, in April 2005, a decision which recognized that ecosystem services are essential for human beings, especially in the framework of integrated water resources

management (IWRM). It called for enhancing the sustainability of ecosystems that provide essential resources and services for human well-being and economic activity, and for developing innovative means to finance their protection.

4. The UNECE Seminar on environmental services and financing for the protection and sustainable use of ecosystems will address these issues and come up with conclusions and recommendations for future action by the Parties to the Convention and their partners. The Seminar will foster the development of concrete joint activities at international, regional, transboundary, national and local levels, and make a specific contribution to the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the 1971 Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (Kampala, Uganda, 8-15 November 2005).

5. The Seminar will take place at the invitation of the Government of Switzerland. It is being prepared by the Swiss Agency for the Environment, Forests and Landscape and the UNECE secretariat of the Water Convention, in close cooperation with the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the secretariat of the 1971 Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. Cooperation has also been sought with the UNECE Timber Committee, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE).

6. This is a follow-up to the Seminar on the role of ecosystems as water suppliers (Geneva, 13-14 December 2004), where government officials, experts from international organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector highlighted the role of water-related ecosystems (wetlands and forests) in water management and made recommendations for an effective implementation of the ecosystem approach.¹ The utmost importance of mechanisms to finance the protection and restoration of water-related ecosystems was particularly underlined at that Seminar.

I. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION AT THE SEMINAR

7. The Seminar will be organized around three major themes: valuing ecosystem services, legal and contractual aspects and challenges for implementation. Each theme will be introduced by one or more keynote lectures. At the end of the Seminar, participants will draw conclusions and make recommendations to the Parties to the Convention.

A. Valuing ecosystem services

8. The discussion will focus on:

(a) Determining factors for using payment for ecosystem services (PES) (e.g. legislative aspects, lack of funding, water-quality and/or water-quantity problems, offer and demand);

(b) Characteristics of river basins or ecosystems favorable to establishing PES;

¹ See <http://www.unece.org/env/water/meetings/ecosystem/seminar.htm>.

- (c) Measuring ecosystem services;
- (d) Social and economic aspects (e.g. social and equity aspects, health related aspects, economic valuation of ecosystem services); and
- (e) Cost-benefit analysis of land use alternatives and their impact on ecosystem services.

B. Legal and contractual aspects

9. The discussion will focus on:

- (a) Legal and regulatory frameworks that can help establish payments for ecosystem services (e.g. national legislation, bilateral and multilateral agreements including ecosystem services, definition of payment and methods of payment, sources of funding, management of the payment scheme);
- (b) Contractual arrangements (e.g. types of contract including self-organized deals, trading schemes and public payment schemes, specifying duration and involvement of stakeholders in the design and operation of the schemes);² and
- (c) Socio-economic and environmental impacts of PES.

C. Challenges for implementation

10. The discussion will focus on:

- (a) Challenges for the establishment of PES (e.g. triggers to establish payment schemes; approaches to involve or jointly act with the private sector; and obstacles to implement payments);
- (b) Challenges for the dissemination of good practice (e.g. awareness and public information campaigns; availability and exchange of information; and the role of civil society);
- (c) Challenges for the private sector (e.g. private sector experience in financing payments for environmental services, public/private partnerships); and

² ***Self-organized private deals:*** payments made voluntarily by members of the private sector, such as private companies or associations of water users, with little or no government involvement. ***Trading schemes:*** usually occur where government sets either a very strict water-quality standard or a cap on total pollution emissions. For example, under nutrient trading, a polluter with a nitrogen or phosphorus discharge level lower than the required standard may exchange this “water-quality credit” with a polluter with a “water-quality deficit”. ***Public payment schemes,*** by far the most common mechanism, are established when a municipality, a regional or national government decides to finance upstream activities such as land retirement or reforestation. In return the government entity expects improvement in hydrological services downstream (from Danièle Perrot-Maître and Patsy Davis, Esq., Case Studies of Markets and Innovative Financial Mechanisms for Water Services from Forests. May 2001, available at <http://www.forest-trends.org/documents/publications/casesWSofF.pdf>).

- (d) Challenges for research and capacity-building initiatives.

II. PARTICIPATION

11. Representatives of Parties to the Convention, of United Nations Member States, of governmental and non-governmental organizations, including civil society and business entities, may participate in the Seminar.

12. With a view to ensuring fruitful discussions, it is suggested that senior representatives from ministries should head governmental delegations, which should include representatives from different levels of government.

13. There is no fee for participation in the Seminar. Participants are expected, however, to meet their own travel, lodging and subsistence expenditures.

14. The Government of Switzerland, which is the lead Party for this activity, is considering providing some financial assistance to experts from countries in transition on condition that these participants submit national reports, discussion papers or deliver keynote lectures. Requests for financial assistance should be submitted not later than **15 September 2005** to the Water Convention's secretariat.

15. Participants are requested to complete the attached registration form also available from the Water Convention's web site (<http://www.unece.org/env/water/meetings/registrationmeeting.htm>) and to transmit it to the UNECE secretariat, at the latest by **30 September 2005**, either by fax (+ 41 22 917 0107) or by e-mail (water.convention@unece.org).

III. SEMINAR DOCUMENTS

A. National reports and discussion papers

16. To facilitate the sharing of experience and good practices, Mr. Philippe Roch, State Secretary, Swiss Agency for the Environment, Forests and Landscape, addressed a letter to Ministers of Environment, Forestry and Agriculture inviting Governments to prepare national reports.³ Thus countries' representatives and representatives of international governmental and non-governmental organizations are invited to submit national reports and discussion papers, respectively, on experience and practical measures to integrate forests, wetlands and agro-ecosystems in water management through payments for the ecosystem services they provide.

17. Authors of national reports and discussion papers are invited to examine the outline provided in the above-mentioned letter before writing their papers. They should not necessarily provide answers to all the issues raised. The reports and discussion papers, however, should be as comprehensive as possible and contain information on the measures

³ See http://www.unece.org/env/water/meetings/payment_ecosystems/Letter_Roch_e.pdf

taken, including examples and good practices, excerpts from national laws and case studies. They should highlight not only success stories; it is equally important to learn about bad experiences and failures.

18. Those countries which do not have payment schemes for ecosystem services are invited to consult the outline when preparing their report, reflecting their problems, needs and concerns regarding the initiation and/or implementation of such schemes.

19. National reports and discussion papers should be submitted to the UNECE Water Convention's secretariat by **15 September 2005 at the latest**, in one of the three Seminar working languages (English, French or Russian). These contributions will be made available at the seminar in their original language(s).

20. Written seminar contributions should not exceed 15 pages including graphs and tables. The text of these contributions should be provided in Microsoft WORD and sent to the secretariat by e-mail and/or on diskette. The title of the contribution, the full name and professional postal address (including telephone and fax numbers, and e-mail addresses) of all authors should be clearly indicated. The authors' family names should be in capital letters. Graphs should be in black and white, and captions should be written in English, French or Russian. Photographs cannot be accepted for reproduction. Footnotes and source and reference notes should be kept to a minimum.

B. Keynote lectures

21. Invited speakers will present keynote lectures on the Seminar's main themes, possibly supported by other presentations.

C. Background documentation

22. Participants may wish to bring to the Seminar relevant background documentation for distribution. They should bring enough copies (e.g. 100 copies in English, 20 in French, 30 in Russian, or a total of 150 copies if submitted in English only). Background documentation will not be discussed in the work sessions of the Seminar.

23. Enquiries about the Seminar, communications and documents should be addressed to:

Water Convention secretariat
United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)
Palais des Nations, office 311
8-14, Avenue de la Paix
CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland
Tel.: (+41) 22 917 2373 or 2463
Fax: (+41) 22 917 0107
E-mail: water.convention@unece.org

IV. ORGANIZATION OF WORK SESSIONS

24. At the beginning of each session, the invited speakers will present their keynote lectures. The ensuing discussions will be based on these lectures, relevant national reports and discussion papers.

25. The authors of discussion papers, except those who have been invited to deliver a speech, are not expected to present their papers orally. They are, however, urged to take an active part in the discussion and to supplement the information contained in their papers by reporting on any new developments they may consider relevant. At the end of each debate, the Chairman will sum up the main points, draw conclusions and propose draft recommendations.



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