Nature for Water:
Protecting water-related ecosystems

Outcome of the December 2005 seminar
It is well understood that population growth and economic activities are putting a huge pressure on fresh waters.
In addition, shortsighted economic and technical development choices have often contributed to the destruction of aquatic and water-related ecosystems with negative consequences for the water resources.
Worldwide, some 2.4 billion people lack access to basic sanitation and 1.2 billion, *or one in five*, lack safe drinking water.

In Europe, 120 million people, *i.e. one in seven*, do not have access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation. . . .

. . . which makes them vulnerable to water-related diseases, such as cholera, bacillary dysentery, coli infections, viral hepatitis A and typhoid.
31% of ECE population lives in countries that experience high water stress.

A number of European countries abstract at least as much surface water as they generate.
Not all Governments have been successful in combating water wastage: rational use of water and control of unaccounted-for water is needed
Floods became one of the most costly “water-quantity” problem in the UNECE region.
A NEW PERCEPTION OF WATER CALLS FOR NEW APPROACHES

• “Water has social, economic and environmental values and should therefore be managed so as to realize the most acceptable and sustainable combination of those values” (Protocol on Water and Health, 1999)

• “Water is not a commercial product like any other but, rather, a heritage which must be protected, defended and treated as such.” (Water Framework Directive, 2000)
Water management requires a comprehensive understanding and careful consideration of ecosystem functions, and of interactions between terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.

Integrated water resources management (IWRM) with strong stakeholder participation, a pro-poor emphasis, and gender sensitivity
Inventory of Transboundary Groundwaters
Apart from the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the UNECE Water Convention, it is only recently that water-related ecosystems, such as forests and wetlands, have been included in water policies, strategies and action plans.

The protection and sustainable management of water-related ecosystems are key to meeting the MDGs (policy integration, safe drinking water, adequate sanitation, ...., poverty reduction). This has now been recognized at the highest political level.
To ensure a sustainable water supply of good quality, we should protect and use in a sustainable manner the ecosystems that naturally capture, filter, store, and release water, such as wetlands, forests and soils.

Ministerial Declaration of the 3rd World Water Forum
Protecting and rehabilitating catchment areas for regulating improving water quality, taking into account the critical role of ecosystems

Enhancing the sustainability of ecosystems that provide essential resources and services for human well-being and economic activity and developing innovative means of financing for their protection

Conclusions and recommendations of CSD-13
Water-related ecosystems . . .

. . . improve water quality, withhold sediments and reduce erosion.
Water-related ecosystems . . .

. . . prevent and reduce the risk of water-related disasters, mitigate floods, store water in areas of flood formation and maintain water supplies through dry seasons and droughts.
Water-related ecosystems . . .

. . . regulate water flows and water supply, encourage water infiltration in the soil, help to recharge groundwaters and store water.
Five pillars for action

- Establishing partnerships
- Getting better information
- Strengthening capacities
- Using innovative economic tools and financing
- Developing national legislation and international agreements
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