

PRIVATE DRAIN ON PUBLIC WATER

THE CRISIS

The destruction of aquatic ecosystem health and increasing water scarcity are among the most pressing problems facing humankind. There is a common assumption that the world's water supply is huge and infinite. This assumption is false. Available fresh water represents less than half of 1 percent of the world's total water stock. The rest is seawater, or inaccessible in ice caps, some groundwater and soil.

Crucially, this supply is finite. While the earth receives approximately 40-45 thousand square kilometres of rain per year, the world population keeps increasing by roughly 85 million per year. Meanwhile we are diverting, polluting and depleting that finite source of fresh water at an astonishing rate.

Worldwide, the consumption of water is doubling every 20 years, at more than twice the rate of the increase in human population, placing enormous pressures on aquatic ecosystems. Today, over a billion people lack adequate access to clean drinking water. By the year 2025, as much as two-thirds of the world's population - will be living in conditions of serious or absolute water scarcity. The UN and the World Bank predict that if we do not change our pattern of water waste, by 2025 the demand for fresh water will rise by 56 percent more than is

currently available.

Around the world practices continue to worsen the situation. In Mexico City, pumping exceeds natural recharge by almost 80 percent every year; at the current rate of extraction. Saudi Arabia will run out of water in 50 years; water tables are falling everywhere throughout India; the water table beneath Beijing has dropped 37 metres over the last four decades. The aquifer that supplies one-third of the fresh water for the United States is being depleted 8 times faster than it is replenished itself and at the same time development in arid places like Phoenix continues at a rate of an acre per hour.

This type of excessive water destroys ground water reservoirs. In some cases, groundwater mining actually permanently reduces the earth's capacity to store water through compaction. Mexico City is actually crushing its water infrastructure to the extent that it may have to be abandoned by the year 2006. In 7 years 20 million people may have to be relocated because of lack of clean water.

At the same time, overexploitation of the planet's major river systems is threatening another finite source of water. The Nile in Egypt, the Ganges in South Asia, the Yellow River in China, and the Colorado River in America are just some of the major rivers that are so dammed, diverted, or overtapped that little or no fresh water reaches its final destination for significant stretches of time.

As well as creating major environmental problems, including salinization, overtapping of groundwater and rivers is exacerbating another potential crisis - world food security. Irrigation for crop production claims 65 percent of all water

used by humans; the annual rise in population means that more water is needed every year for grain production, a highly water intensive activity. But the world's burgeoning cities and industries are demanding and taking more and more of the water earmarked for agriculture every year. Eventually some dry areas will not be able to serve both the needs of farming and those of the ballooning cities.

The story is perhaps most stark in China, which faces severe grain shortages in the near future because of water depletion and the current shift of limited water resources from agriculture to industry. Estimates predict that annual industrial water use in China could grow from 52 billion tons to 269 billion tons. The resulting demand for grain in China could exceed the world's available exportable supplies. While China might be able to survive this for a time because of its booming economy and huge trade surpluses, the resulting higher grain prices will create social and political upheaval in most major Third World cities and shake food security of the whole world. Already, as big industrial wells probe the ground ever deeper to tap the remaining water, millions of Chinese farmers have found their wells pumped dry. Three hundred Chinese cities are already facing severe water shortage. When rising incomes are allowing millions of Chinese to install indoor plumbing with showers and flush toilets. The World Watch Institute says that China will be the first country in the world that will have to literally restructure its economy to respond to water scarcity.

Around the world, the answer to the increase in water demand is to build more dams and river diversions. But we are now facing manipulation on a scale that is totally unsustainable. The number of large dams world-wide has climbed from

just over 5,000 in 1950 to 38,000.

The world's waterways are also struggling with the full range of modern industrial toxic pollution problems. Ninety percent of the developing world's wastewater is still discharged untreated into local rivers and streams.

One billion pounds of weed and bug killers are used throughout the United States every year, and much, perhaps most, of it runs off into the country's water systems. Nearly 40 percent of U.S. rivers and streams are too dangerous for fishing, swimming or drinking.

In Canada, wetland loss includes 65 percent of Atlantic coastal marshes, 70 percent of Southern Ontario wetlands, 71 percent of Prairie wetlands, and 80 percent of the Fraser River Delta in British Columbia. Over a century of mining, forestry and large-scale industry has affected virtually every water body in Canada and toxic chemicals are found even in the most remote parts of the Far North. The Great Lakes has lost two thirds of its once extensive wetlands and over 98 percent of its native species population. Less than 3 percent of the lakes' shoreline is suitable for swimming, drinking or even supporting any aquatic life.

The Aral Sea basin shared by Afghanistan, Iran and five countries of the former Soviet Union, was once the world's fourth largest lake. Excessive river diversions have caused it to lose half its area and three fourths of its volume, while its surrounding wetlands have shrunk by 85 percent. One of the planet's greatest environmental tragedies, almost all fish and waterfowl species have been decimated and the fisheries has collapsed entirely. Millions of "ecological refugees" have fled the area.

There is simply no way to overstate the water crisis of the planet today. The World Bank predicts that the wars of the next century will be over water. No piecemeal solution is going to prevent the collapse of whole societies and ecosystems. A radical rethinking of our values, priorities and political systems is urgent and still possible. Yet there are forces at work in the world today that, unless challenged, would move the world almost inexorably into a water scarce future.

THE IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION

The dominant economic and political system of our time is fuelled by the ideology of economic globalization, the belief that a single global economy with universal rules set by business and a global consumer market is our inevitable shared future. Everything is for sale, even those areas of life once considered sacred, such as health and education, culture and heritage, genetic codes and seeds, and natural resources, including air and water.

Economic globalization has commodified nature at the very time governments all over the world are dismantling environmental legislation or allowing industry to police itself. Countries are lowering corporate taxes and environmental regulations in order to remain competitive, the primary mandate of the new economy. Moreover, globalization is fuelled by the imperative of unlimited growth and the necessity of exponential global trade for economic health.

THE WATER PRIVATEERS

From water and wastewater services and bottled water for the world's boutique

market, to massive diversions and exports of bulk water from water-rich countries to the industrial zones of others, the world's most precious resource is seen to hold vast potential for profit. "Water is the last infrastructure frontier for private investors," says Johan Bastin of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Tragically, water is also the last frontier of nature and the commons.

The Globe and Mail says that privatizing water looms as the national mega-industry of the next decade, with potential investment in the tens of billions of dollars. "Water is fast becoming a globalized corporate industry." The world of privatized water is overwhelmingly dominated by two French transnationals, Vivendi SA, whose water division is Generale des Eaux, and Suez Lyonnaise des Eaux - the General Motors and Ford Company of the water world. Between them, they own, or have controlling interests in, water companies in approximately 120 countries on five continents and distribute water to almost 100 million people in the world.

U.S. energy giant Enron, having acquired Wessex Water PLC of Britain, and Phillip's of Canada, is bidding for huge contracts against the established players for newly privatized water services in countries around the world, including Canada. Rebecca Mark, head of Enron's water division, says she won't rest until she has privatized the world's water.

These companies stand to reap huge windfalls as governments around the world, having allowed their municipal infrastructures to crumble, now hand the wholesale water market over to the private sector. In England, between 1989,

when water was privatized and 1995, there was a 106 percent increase in the rate charged to customers, while the profits of the companies increased by 692 percent and the number of customers who had their water disconnected because they couldn't afford to pay for the price increased by 50 percent. Water privatization is always accompanied by huge layoffs and the public often loses its right to access to information about water quality and standards. In India, some privatized households pay a staggering 25 percent of their income on water.

THE GLOBAL TRADE IN WATER

The water privateers have now set their sites on the mass export of bulk water, by diversion and by supertanker. Nowhere are corporations lining up to trade in water as they are in North America. Several are directly involved with plans to divert massive amounts of Canadian water to water-scarce areas of the United States, Asia and the Middle East by tanker, pipeline, or rerouting of natural river systems.

One of the largest proposed diversion projects back on the table for discussion is the GRAND Canal - the Great Recycling and Northern Development Canal which calls for the building of a dike across James Bay at the mouth of Hudson Bay (both of which now flow North) to create a giant freshwater reservoir out of James Bay and the twenty rivers flowing into it. A massive series of dikes, canals, dams, power plants and locks would divert this water down a canal to Georgian Bay, where it would be flushed through the Great Lakes and taken to the U.S. sunbelt.

The NAWAPA - the North American Water and Power Alliance - has gone through a similar rebirth. The original plan envisaged building a large number of major dams to trap the Yukon, Peace and Liard Rivers into a giant reservoir that would flood one-tenth of British Columbia to create a canal from Alaska to Washington State and supply water through existing canals and pipelines to thirty-five American states.

Says the Report on Business Magazine: "Pollution, population growth and environmental crusading are expected to put enormous pressure on the world's supply of fresh water over the next ten years. Some of Canada's largest engineering companies are gearing up for the day when water is moved around the world like oil or wheat or wood...What will be important is who has the right to sell it to the highest bidder." An August, 1995 World Bank study said that market interest in Canada's water resources would only increase with time.

Similarly, the call to export water by supertanker is heating up again in Canada after a lull of a few years. In British Columbia, a number of export companies were lined up for business when the government banned the export of bulk water in 1993. One project was to involve a Texas company prepared to pay for a fleet of twelve to sixteen of the world's largest supertankers to operate around the clock. Under this one contract, the volume of water to be shipped to California was equivalent to the total annual water consumption of the city of Vancouver. The same companies would transport oil and water, in some cases, emptying oil on one leg of the trip, and carrying water home on the return voyage.

In the spring of 1998, Ontario-based Nova Group received the environmental go-

ahead from the province of Ontario to export millions of litres of Lake Superior water by tanker to Asia; however, the province rescinded the grant after an outcry from both the International Joint Commission and U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. In Newfoundland, a request to export 52 billion litres of water a year from pristine Gisborne Lake in the Newfoundland wilderness, seems poised to be given the go-ahead. The company, McCurdy Group, plans to ship the water to the Middle East by supertanker where it expects to make a large profit.

Dennis Mills, a Member of Parliament for the ruling Liberals, is publicly calling for Canada to open its water resources to international trade. On its website, the Federal Environment Department predicts that Canada will in the commercial water export business with the decade. In February, 1999, The National Post called Canada's water "blue gold" and demanded that the government "turn on the tap." Its business columnist, Terence Corcoran, added fuel to the fire: "Canada is a future OPEC of water. Here's a worthwhile long-term bet: By 2010, Canada will be exporting large quantities of fresh water to the U.S., and more by tanker to parched nations all over the globe.

"The issue will not be whether to export, but how much money the federal government and the provinces will be able to extract from massive water shipments. Rather than resisting the idea of water exports, Canada will end up scrambling to head the WWET, the World Water Export Treaty, signed in 2006 by 25 countries with vast water reserves. Using the OPEC model, they will attempt to cartelize the world supply of water and drive the price up."

However, it isn't only Canada being eyed by transnational business. A Canadian company, Global Water Corporation, has signed an agreement with Sitka, Alaska, to export 58 billion litres per year of glacier water to China where it will be bottled in one of that country's infamous free trade zones to save on labour costs. Although the company brochure acknowledges that there is a severe water crisis in China, it entices investors "to harvest the accelerating opportunity...as traditional sources of water around the world become progressively depleted and degraded" and laments the fact that the government of British Columbia has placed a ban on bulk water exports.

The company bluntly states: "Water has moved from being an endless commodity that may be taken for granted to a rationed necessity that may be taken by force."

The trade in bottled water is one of the fastest-growing (and least regulated) industries in the world. There has been an explosion in bottled water sales in the last five years - over 20 percent annually. In 1998, over 18 billion litres of water was bottled and traded globally, over 90 percent of it in non-renewable plastic containers. As the world's freshwater supply becomes more degraded, those who can afford it are sticking almost exclusively to the packaged item, even though bottled water is not necessarily safer than tap water.

There are literally thousands of water bottling companies now in the business. As well, the big soft drink players are entering the market in force. PepsiCo has its Aquafina line and CocaCola has just launched the North American version of its international label, Bon Aqua, called Dasani. CocaCola predicts that its water line

will surpass its soft-drink line within a decade.

These companies are engaged in a relentless search for new water supplies to feed the global appetite of the business and are engaging in the trade of water by tanker and the sale of water rights by farmers. Stories of companies buying up farmland to access its wells and then moving on when supplies are depleted are surfacing in rural communities all over the world. Sometimes, these companies leave dried up systems in a whole area, not just the private land they bought.

Of course, the global poverty gap is mirrored in the inequitable access to bottled water by the world's people. For the same price as one bottle of this "boutique" consumer item, 3,000 litres of tap water could be delivered to homes. This irony cannot be lost on the industry, which pedals its product as environmentally friendly and part of a healthy lifestyle. In fact, however, allowing the world's public water sources to be destroyed while creating a multi-billion dollar industry to provide "pure" water to the world's rich in non-renewable plastic is a form of insanity.

THE FAILURE OF GOVERNMENTS

Governments all over the world have been unforgivably remiss in not recognizing the crisis surrounding the world's water resources and for not planning to take steps to offset the coming emergency.

The United Nations points out that governments in developed and developing countries alike give low priority to water issues and institutions; funding for research and solutions is abysmally inadequate. Freshwater management is in

its infancy and political commitment, public education and conservation awareness are sadly lacking all over the world.

As well, governments and industry all over the world continue to engage in destructive practices. The loss of water through poor municipal infrastructure and irrigation waste is being exacerbated in many places as governments in the Third World sink ever deeper in poverty in the wake of the global financial meltdown and governments in the First World cut spending on public works and eviscerate their legal protections for the environment, species and natural resources in the name of global competitiveness. In the developing world, up to 75 percent of irrigation water never reaches the crop and at least 50 percent of municipal water is wasted through leakage.

A coordinated effort by the world's governments could change this pattern of wastage within a decade. With current technologies and methods available today, a conservative estimate is that agriculture could cut its water demands by close to 50 per cent, industries by 50 to 90 per cent, and cities by one third with no sacrifice to economic output or quality of life. What is missing is political will and vision.

Further, in the absence of legislation or even debate in most countries, the privatization of water and wastewater services is steadily advancing. Through "public-private partnerships," municipal governments in many countries are blurring the lines between private companies and democratically-elected governments. Often, these "partnerships" are the first step to full privatization. And because many of the same companies providing these services also have

the ability to move into the area of bulk export, dams and water diversion, governments are granting them access to water resources through the back door.

In fact, governments everywhere appear to be on the privatization bandwagon. The UN Economic and Social Council Commission on Sustainable Development actually proposes that governments turn to "large multinational companies" for capital and expertise and calls for an "open market" in water rights. At a March, 1998, UN conference in Paris, governments proposed to turn water into a global commodity, driven by market forces and higher prices and called for an enlarged role for the private sector.

As well, the UN and the World Bank have formed the World Water Council which brings together governments, the private sector and civil society to address the world's water crisis and which works directly with private corporations through its action arm, the Global Water Partnership. A World Bank sponsored program called "Business Partners for Development" makes it clear that some of the biggest water privateers, like Lyonnaise des Eaux, are closely involved in this process and have embarked on a process to work toward a "Social Charter for Water."

It is clear that transnational water corporations are waging an offensive on many fronts to take over the agenda of international water sustainable development programs for their own profit and governments are openly colluding.

Finally, and most important, governments have very few laws or regulations to protect their water systems. Most haven't even begun to address the issues of

privatization, commercialization and trade in water. Yet, while they leave their water resources unprotected by legislation, they are actively negotiating and signing international trade and investment agreements that supersede national law. These treaties include the trade in water and some even explicitly grant water rights to the private sector. The most immediate example is the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) signed by Canada, the United States and Mexico in 1993.

THE THREAT OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND INVESTMENT AGREEMENTS

Chapter 3 of NAFTA establishes obligations regarding the trade in goods. It uses the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) definition of a “good” which clearly lists, “waters, including natural or artificial waters and aerated waters” and adds in an explanatory note that “ordinary natural water of all kinds (other than sea water)” is included.

U.S. officials confirmed that this was, in fact, the intent of the trade deals when they were negotiated. In 1993, then U.S. Trade Representative Mickey Kantor said in a letter to a U.S. environmental group, “When water is traded as a good, all provisions of the agreement governing trade in goods apply.” In other words, the question is moot until one of the governments grants a permit to export water.

There are three key provisions of NAFTA that place water at risk once it is traded. The first is “National Treatment” whereby no country can “discriminate” in

favour of its own private sector in the commercial use of its water resources. Once a permit is granted to export water in one country, the corporations of the other NAFTA partner countries would have the same right of establishment to the commercial use of that country's waters as its domestic companies. If a Canadian company, for instance, gained the right to export Canadian water, American transnationals would have the right to help themselves to as much Canadian water as they wished.

The second provision is "Investor State" (Chapter 11) whereby a corporation of a NAFTA country can sue the government of another NAFTA country for cash compensation if the company is refused its national treatment rights or if that country implements legislation that "expropriates" the company's future profit. Only a "foreign-based" company can sue using Chapter 11; domestic companies have to abide by national law and cannot sue their own government for compensation under NAFTA. There have been a flurry of investor state suits in North America since NAFTA was signed challenging environmental, health and safety legislation in the three countries.

Chapter 11 could be used in two ways regarding water. If any NAFTA country, state or province tries to allow only domestic companies to export water, corporations in the other countries would have the right to financial compensation for "discrimination." Further, the very act of a government attempt to ban bulk water exports automatically makes water a commercial tradeable commodity, triggering NAFTA. Foreign "investors" would be granted NAFTA rights in the very law that excludes them, and they could claim for financial compensation for lost

opportunities.

The first NAFTA Chapter 11 case on water was filed in the fall of 1998. Sun Belt Water Inc. of Santa Barbara, California, is suing the Canadian government because the company lost a contract to export water to California when the government of British Columbia banned the export of bulk water in 1991. Although Sun Belt's agreement was with a Canadian company, Snowcap, and not the government of British Columbia, Sun Belt alleges that the ban contravenes NAFTA and is seeking \$400 million in damages.

Corporations understands that NAFTA gives it the right to shape Canadian government policy. "Because of NAFTA, we are now stakeholders in the national water policy in Canada," declared its CEO, Jack Lindsay. His company is openly courting B.C. coastal communities to consider water exports and is urging local politicians to lobby the provincial government to reverse its ban on exports.

The third provision is "Proportionality" whereby a government of a NAFTA country cannot reduce or restrict the export of a resource to another NAFTA country once the export flow has been established. This means that if the export of water through tankers or diversion were to commence between NAFTA countries, the tap couldn't be turned off, even if new evidence found that massive movements of water were harmful to the environment.

In February 1999, bowing to intense public pressure to prevent the bulk export of Canadian water, the government of Canada outlined a "strategy" to protect water in its territory, basically asking each province to implement a voluntary moratorium on water exports. However, the proposal falls far short of a national

ban on the sale of water and likely could not stand a legal challenge by another NAFTA country. For example, if any province refuses to impose a moratorium (Quebec has already indicated it will refuse to participate), the terms of NAFTA render other provincial bans null and void. Only by specifically exempting water altogether from NAFTA will the Canadian government be allowed to place a real ban on water exports.

NAFTA is not the only existing trade agreement that compromises water. The World Trade Organization (WTO) was created in 1995 at the conclusion of the Uruguay Round of the GATT. The WTO includes water; it incorporates the same GATT definition of a "good" as does NAFTA. Unlike any other global institution, including NAFTA, the WTO has both the legislative and judicial authority to challenge laws, policies, and programs of member countries if they do not conform to WTO rules, and to strike these rules down if they can be shown to be "trade restrictive."

Article XI specifically prohibits export bans on any good. This means that quotas or bans on the export of water are simply not allowed. Article 20, which is supposed to allow governments to put in place environmental protections, has been made useless by repeated rulings that anything that limits trade violates the WTO agreement. Unless our government insists that water be exempted altogether from these and other trade and investment agreements, transnational corporations will be able to claim Canadian water resources one day in the near future.

THE NEED FOR COMMON PRINCIPLES

On the eve of the Millennium, the world is poised to make crucial, perhaps irrevocable decisions about water. The human race has taken water for granted and massively misjudged the capacity of the earth's water systems to recover from our carelessness. Just as we are beginning to face this reality, corporations recognizing the growing demand for fresh water are positioning themselves to cash in on our dependence on this vital resource.

In a commercially traded water exchange, those who really need the water would be the least likely to receive it. Water hauled by tankers to far-away destinations would only be available to the wealthy in those markets, especially large corporations. Importing water for the elites who could afford it would reduce the urgency and political pressure to find real, sustainable and equitable solutions to water problems in water-scarce countries.

However, what of the humanitarian argument that in a world of water inequality, water-rich areas have an obligation to share water supplies with others? Perhaps here, it would be helpful to distinguish between short-term and long-term situations. For all concerned, importing water is not a desirable long-term solution for either the ecosystems or the peoples of water-scarce regions of the world. Water is such an essential necessity of life, no-one should become dependent on foreign supplies that could be cut for political or environmental reasons. By exporting for other peoples' needs, a relationship of dependency would be established that is good for neither side.

There are now many scientific studies that show that large-scale water removal affects not just the immediate systems, but ecosystems far beyond. Scientists warn that tampering with nature by removing vast amounts of water from watersheds has the potential to destroy ecosystems. Lowering water tables can create sinkholes and dry up wells. The experience in Canada shows that local climate change, reduced bio-diversity, mercury poisoning, loss of forest, and the destruction of fisheries habitat and wetland has already resulted from existing water diversions and hydro-electric projects.

Their work proves beyond all doubt that water is not 'wasted' by running into the sea. It suggests that the cumulative effects of removing water from lakes, rivers and streams for export by tanker could have large-scale impacts on the coastal and marine environment.

It is also helpful to distinguish between water trading and water sharing.

As environmental researcher Jamie Linton says, "Perhaps the strongest argument against commercial water export is that it would only perpetuate the basic problem that has caused the 'water crisis' in the first place - the presumption that peoples' growing demands for water can and should always be met by furnishing an increase in the supply. This thinking has led to the draining of lakes, the depletion of aquifers and destruction of aquatic ecosystems around the world."

If, however, we maintain water in public control, it might be possible to share water supplies on a short-term basis between countries in times of crisis. In these cases, conditions with timetables would have to be set to restore the water health

of the receiving regions so as to return them to water independence as soon as possible and water could be used as a kind of leverage to ensure water restoration. This kind of resolution is not conceivable, however, if the privatization of the world's water continues unchallenged, for corporations would not allow a non-profit system of water transfer to be established.

Ten Principles to Protect and Share Water

I want to propose to you tonight is a new “water ethic” based on the principle that water is part of the earth’s heritage and must be preserved in the public domain for all time and protected by strong local, national and international law. At stake is the whole notion of “the commons,” the idea that through our public institutions we recognize a shared human and natural heritage to be preserved for future generations. Citizens in communities must be the watchdogs of our waterways and must establish community organizations to oversee the wise and conserving use of this precious resource.

In order to take the kind of action needed by all levels of government and communities around the world, it is urgent that we come to agreement on a set of guiding principles and values. The following are offered as an opening dialogue:

- 1) Water belongs to the earth and all species.

Water, like air, is necessary for all life. Without water, humans, other animals and species would die and the earth’s systems would shut down. Modern society has lost its reverence for water’s sacred place in the cycle of life as well as its

centrality to the realm of the spirit. This loss of reverence for water has allowed humans to abuse it. Only by redefining our relationship to water and recognizing water's essential and sacred place in nature, can we begin to right the wrongs we have done.

Because water belongs to the earth and all species, decision-makers must represent the rights and needs of other species, such as fish, and plants dependent on water systems for life, in their policy choices and actions. Future generations also constitute "stakeholder" status requiring representation in decision-making about water.

2) Water should be left where it is wherever possible.

Nature put water where it belongs. Tampering with nature by removing vast amounts of water from watersheds has the potential to destroy ecosystems.

Commercially trading water would only perpetuate the basic problem that has caused the "water crisis" in the first place - that we continuously reach outside our communities for more. By accepting this principle, we learn the nature of water's limits and to live within them, and we start to look our own regions, communities and homes for ways to meet our needs while respecting water's place in nature.

3) Water must be conserved for all time.

Each generation must ensure that the abundance and quality of water is not

diminished as a result of its activities. The single most important way to solve the problem of global water scarcity is to radically change our habits. At the heart of this change is the need to conserve water. People living in the wealthy countries of the world must change our patterns of water consumption, particularly if we come from water-rich bio-regions. If we don't change our reluctance to share their water sources with others, even for sound environmental and ethical reasons, will be rightly called into question.

4) Polluted water must be reclaimed.

The human race has collectively polluted the world's water supply and must collectively take responsibility for reclaiming it. Water scarcity and pollution are caused by economic values that encourage overconsumption and grossly inefficient use of water. These values are wrong. A resolution to reclaim polluted water is an act of self-preservation. Only returning naturally functioning ecosystems to their most healthy state will keep humans and other species alive.

5) Water is best protected in natural watersheds.

The future of a water-secure world is based on the need to live within naturally formed "bioregions," or watersheds. Bioregionalism is the practice of living within the constraints of a natural ecosystem. Living within the ecological constraints of a region is key to developing a sustainable society and watersheds are an excellent starting point for establishing bioregional practices. Watershed

management offers a more interdisciplinary approach to protecting water. Watersheds, not political or bureaucratic boundaries, will lead to more collaborative protection and decision-making.

6) Water is a public trust to be guarded by all levels of government.

Because water, like air, belongs to the earth and all species, no one has the right to appropriate it or profit from it at someone else's expense. Water then, is a public trust that must be guarded by all levels of government and communities everywhere. Water should not be privatized, commodified, traded or exported in bulk for commercial purpose. Governments all over the world must take immediate action to declare that the waters in their territories are a public good and enact strong regulatory structures to protect them. Water should immediately be exempted from all existing and future international and bilateral trade and investment agreements. Governments must ban the commercial trade in large-scale water projects. No decisions about water use should ever be made without a full consideration of ecosystem impacts.

7) An adequate supply of clean water is a basic human right.

Every person in the world has a right to clean water and healthy sanitation systems no matter where they live. This right is best ensured by keeping water and sewage services in the public sector, by regulating the protection of water supplies and by promoting the efficient use of water. Adequate supplies of clean

water for people in water-scarce regions can only be ensured by promoting conservation and protection of local water resources.

Governments everywhere must implement a “local sources first” policy to protect the basic rights of their citizens to fresh water. Local citizens and communities have first rights to local water; agribusiness and industry, particularly large transnational corporations, must fit into a “local-first” policy or be shut down. This does not mean that water should be “free” or that everyone can help themselves. However, a policy of water pricing that respects this principle would help ration water in order to protect it, but, at the same time, reflect the rights of all to have access to this necessity of life.

8) The best advocates for water are local communities and citizens.

Local stewardship, not private business, expensive technology, or even government, is the best protector of water-security. Only local citizens can understand the overall cumulative effect of privatization, pollution and water removal and diversion on the local community. It must be understood that local citizens and communities are the front-line “keepers” of the rivers, lakes and underground water systems upon which their lives and livelihoods rest. In order to be affordable, sustainable and equitable, the solutions to water stress and water scarcity must be locally inspired and community-based.

- 9) The public must participate as an equal partner with government to protect water.

A fundamental principle for a water-secure future is that the public must be consulted and engaged in a real manner and as an equal partner with governments at all levels in establishing regulation and policies around water use. The way in which decisions about water use and access are made has been highly elitist, clearly authoritarian and profoundly undemocratic. Processes must be created whereby citizens, workers and environmental representatives are treated as equal partners in the determination of water policy and recognized as the true inheritors and guardians of the above principles.

- 10) Economic globalization is not water sustainable.

Economic globalization and its values of unlimited growth, increased global trade and competitiveness, is totally incompatible with the search for solutions to water-scarcity. Designed to reward the strongest and most ruthless, economic globalization locks out the forces of local democracy so desperately needed for a water-secure future. If we accept the principle that to protect water we must attempt to live within our watersheds, the globalization practice of viewing the world as one seamless consumer market must be abandoned.

A CITIZENS' GUIDE TO ACTION

At the moment, governments are not doing their job to protect our water

resources. I believe that a new citizens' movement is going to have to come together to protect the world's water resources and define a new water ethic for the 21st Century. Within every community and in every country, citizens are going to have to take charge of this issue. We are going to have to formulate the policies and laws needed at every level of government, including the international level, and set out to make them real.

The time has come to take a clear and principled stand to stop the systematic devastation of the world's water systems. In the long term, nation-states have to be retooled in order to establish the regulations and protections necessary to save their water systems. International law must be developed as well that recognizes and enforces the social obligations of global capital in the interests of the global "water commons." Meanwhile, it is up to us, the ordinary citizens of the earth, to do this work that bears our name.

Michael Parfit of the National Geographic explains our deeply personal relationship with water this way:

Watersheds come in families; nested levels of intimacy. On the grandest scale the hydrologic web is like all humanity - Serbs, Russians, Koyukon Indians, Amish, the billion lives in the People's Republic of China - it's broadly troubled, but it's hard to know how to help. As you work upstream toward home, you're more closely related. The big river is like your nation, a little out of hand. The lake is your cousin. The creek is your sister. The pond is her child. And, for better or worse, in sickness and in health, you're married to your sink.

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