

Watershed Conservation Fact Sheet

Healthy watersheds are essential to life, health and economic growth and prosperity, yet forty-one percent of the world's population lives in an area with a watershed that is under stress. A primary component of our partnership is conserving seven of the world's most important watersheds – The [Yangtze River](#), [Southeastern U.S. Rivers and Streams](#), the [Rio Grande/Rio Bravo River](#), the [Mesoamerican Reef](#), the [Mekong River](#), [Rivers and Lakes of Coastal East Africa](#) and the [Danube River](#).

As two of the world's most recognized brands, The Coca-Cola Company (TCCC) and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) bring a wealth of knowledge, experience and complimentary perspective to water management issues and are committed to working together to achieve our common goals. Because TCCC depends on regional water supplies, understanding watersheds and how they work is extremely important to its business. As one of the world's preeminent conservation organizations, watershed conservation is also important to WWF.

About Watersheds

Each of us lives in a watershed, and all businesses are located in watersheds. A watershed is, simply, a geographic region whose boundaries are defined by the land and water bodies that feed any precipitation (e.g., rain, snow) into a common collection area. Watersheds come in all shapes and sizes and can cross local, state and national borders. A watershed may be home to rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, reservoirs and wetlands – as well as ground water. It may also include mountains, hills, mesas, plains or lowlands.

A region's watershed generally provides the water for the people who live there and the businesses and farms in the area while also sustaining the natural plant, aquatic and animal life around us. Anything that affects the land or water bodies within a watershed, including pollution, erosion, drought or overuse, ultimately affects the quality and quantity of the region's water supply.

Watersheds We Will Conserve

TCCC and WWF will work together to conserve seven of the world's most important watersheds, which span more than 20 countries in North America, Europe, Africa and Asia. The watersheds selected for this partnership were chosen based on several factors. Those factors include biological diversity (species richness and endemism, unique habitat types, etc.), opportunity for meaningful conservation gains (a solid foundation of previous work on which to build, opportunities to attract partners, leverage funding, etc.), potential to advance issues of resource protection and importance to the communities in which TCCC operates around the world.

The challenges in each watershed vary greatly, from dams that have outgrown their usefulness, to agriculture run-off issues to loss of habitat due to development and land reclamation. As each area is examined, WWF and TCCC teams will develop action plans, based on the specific conservation issues that need to be addressed. Each plan will include defined focus areas, as well as means for measuring and reporting on progress over the course of the project. Included below are facts about each water basin, key conservation issues and preliminary details about

the work of the partnership in five of the watersheds.

This fact sheet will be updated regularly with current information about what is happening in each of the watersheds.

Yangtze River

Facts

- The Yangtze River, the third longest river in the world, flows 6,300 kilometers from the Tibetan Plateau through the Shanghai estuary into the East China Sea. Its basin holds 40 percent of China's freshwater.
- The Yangtze River Basin covers 1.8 million square kilometers. It is seven times the size of the United Kingdom, with 700 tributaries.
- The giant panda, Siberian crane and clouded leopard are among the many rare species in the region.

Conservation Issues

- Rapid population growth and clearing for timber and agriculture have shrunk the natural forest cover of the river basin from 30 percent in the 1950s to just 10 percent today. The lack of forest cover has aggravated flooding and resulting erosion has sent 680 million tons of soil into the river.
- Habitat loss due to development and land reclamation has harmed the populations of several species. Natural fisheries production has declined 75 percent.
- More than five hundred dams and dykes disrupt the Yangtze's natural flow and cut lakes off from the river system. Pollutants from China's rapidly expanding industrial sector have contaminated much of the river.

What the Partnership Will Do

- Engage in watershed management projects in two upper Yangtze tributaries, the Minjiang and Jialingjiang Rivers.
- Work with Coca-Cola bottling plants in the Yangtze basin to develop best management practices for water use and water stewardship.
- Promote best practices among industries and other water users throughout the basin.

Southeastern U.S. Rivers and Streams

Facts

- The region encompasses nearly 265,000 square kilometers.
- During the last ice age, glaciers stopped just north of the southeastern United States, allowing life in the rivers to evolve and diversify without interruption.
- Alabama's Cahaba River is home to 190 fish species, more species per mile than any other river on the North American continent.

Conservation Issues

- The Tennessee/Cumberland and Mobile River Basins are experiencing the highest freshwater extinction rates in North America.
- Poorly planned development and sprawl puts increasing pressure on watersheds and pollutes them with sedimentation.
- Run-off from agricultural, mining and forestry operations degrade water quality.
- Dams that have often outlived their usefulness fragment and alter stream habitats.
- Demand for water is increasing to support explosive population growth.

What the Partnership Will Do

- Pursue stream restoration, small dam removal and species reintroduction in the Tennessee, Cumberland and Mobile river basins.
- Promote river-friendly development projects in these three basins.
- Promote community engagement and volunteer opportunities with The Coca-Cola Company and local Coca-Cola bottlers.

Rio Grande/Rio Bravo

Facts

- Called the Rio Grande in the U.S. and the Río Bravo in Mexico, the river rises in the San Juan Mountains of Colorado and flows 1,885 miles through New Mexico, Texas and Mexico to the Gulf of Mexico.
- The inflow from the Rio Conchos, a primary tributary, accounts for 70 to 90 percent of the water in the portion of the river below Big Bend.

Conservation Issues

- In 2001, for the first time in recorded history, the Rio Grande/Río Bravo failed to reach the Gulf of Mexico. Over-exploitation of water resources is the most serious problem facing the basin. Despite water scarcity, per capita consumption rates are among the highest in the U.S.
- Hundreds of dams and thousands of miles of canals disrupt the river and divert water to support the agricultural industry. Inefficiencies in irrigation systems waste up to 40 percent of water, totaling billions of gallons annually.
- Consistently low water levels increase salinization and worsen pollution in the river. The river has lost half of its native fish, and many other species have also gone extinct or are endangered.

What the Partnership Will Do

- Help ensure the flows of the river to support ecosystems in selected reaches.
- Raise awareness of the conservation project through a partnership with local youth hostels and *Fundación Coca-Cola*.
- Partner with Coca-Cola bottler ARCA to strengthen river management bodies in Mexico.

Mesoamerican Reef

Facts

- The Mesoamerican Reef is the longest barrier reef in the world. The Mesoamerican Reef basins are numerous small watersheds that drain from Mexico, Guatemala, Belize and Honduras into the reef.
- The Motagua and Polochic Rivers in Guatemala, where WWF and Coca-Cola are already working together, are two of the main contributors of sediment and organic pollutants that are threatening the Reef.
- The reef stretches nearly 700 miles and is home to 500 species of fish, including the massive whale shark, the largest fish in the world. The reef serves as an important habitat to endangered sea turtles, manatees and crocodiles.
- The reef's immense size provides an important defense against storms and coastal erosion.

Conservation Issues

- The Motagua's water levels and quality have significantly declined recently, particularly during the dry season.
- The greatest threats to the river are deforestation, forest fires, cattle ranching and agricultural expansion.
- The Motagua-Polochic river system is home to more than a third of all mammals and reptiles known in Guatemala and Belize, including many endangered species such as howler monkeys, jaguars and harpy eagles.

What the Partnership Will Do

- Establish the Motagua-Polochic Water Fund to provide payment to upstream water resource users to protect the quality and quantity of these resources for downstream users.
- Protect a migratory bird corridor between Sierra del Las Minas and Bocas del Polochic
- Engage in settlement relocation efforts.
- Eliminate illegal logging operations.
- Organize groups of volunteers to stop forest fires and improve regional fire-fighting capacity.
- Educate communities to improve water use practices.

Mekong River

Facts

- The longest river in Southeast Asia, the Mekong, rises on the Tibetan Plateau and runs 4,500 kilometers through China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam.
- The river basin is 800,000 square kilometers and encompasses an extraordinary range of geographical features including mountainous tropical evergreen forests in Vietnam and Laos, dry open woodlands and riverine wetlands in Cambodia and Thailand.
- The Mekong River is second only to the Amazon in freshwater species diversity, with an estimated 1,300 species of fish, including the Mekong Giant Catfish, the world's largest freshwater fish.

Conservation Issues

- Compared to many great rivers, much of the Mekong is relatively unspoiled. However, it is under increasing pressure from hydroelectric dams, overfishing, mining, and unsustainable agricultural development on its banks. Poorly planned roads, bridges and levees lead to sedimentation and aggravate flooding.
- The impacts of these threats are made evident by studies of the declining populations of Mekong Giant Catfish and the Mekong Dolphin. There are fewer than 80 dolphins left in the Mekong River.

What the Partnership Will Do

- Establish watershed restoration and community natural resource management projects at the Chi River (Thailand) and the Mekong Delta (Vietnam).
- Build on field work to influence markets and water resource management policies across the Mekong basin.
- Partner with Coca-Cola bottlers Thai Pure Drinks Limited and SABCO to promote more sustainable sugar production and watershed stewardship.

Rivers and Lakes of Coastal East Africa

Facts

- The Coastal East Africa Ecoregion is comprised of several rivers and lakes that primarily drain to the Indian Ocean or the African great lakes.
- The Rufiji River rises in the highlands of Tanzania and flows 600 km to the sea. Its chief tributary is the Great Ruaha.
- The Ruaha River drains 84,000 square kilometers and is the lifeblood of agriculture and wildlife in southern Tanzania.
- Lake Malawi/Nyasa/Niassa, the ninth largest lake in the world at 29,609 square kilometers, forms the border of Malawi and Mozambique. It is drained by the Shire River, which flows to the mighty Zambezi.

Conservation Issues

- The Rufiji/Ruaha is under tremendous stress from drought, over-allocation and streambank erosion. In the mid-nineties, the Great Ruaha ran dry for the first time in living memory.
- Communities dependent on the river for food and fiber production and tourism are threatened by the river's degradation.
- Lake Malawi formerly was the only lake where people did not contract bilharzias, a disease transmitted by a parasite that millions suffer from in Africa. In the past, cichlid fish populations kept Lake Malawi disease-free. However, an imbalance has been introduced into this relationship and the disease can now be contracted in Lake Malawi.

Danube River

Facts

- At 2,870 kilometers in length, the Danube is the second longest river in Europe and the Danube Delta is one of the most important wetland areas in the world, home to more than 3,400 fauna and 1,650 flora species.
- The 801,463 square kilometer Danube basin abuts 19 countries, making it the most "international" river basin in the world.
- Rising in Germany and flowing across Europe to the Black Sea, the basin encompasses Germany's Black Forest, the Alps, the Carpathian Mountains, the Hungarian puszta plains, the Bulgarian islands and the giant reed beds and marshes of the Danube Delta.

Conservation Issues

- Channeling and the construction of dykes and dams for traditional flood management, shipping routes, hydropower and agriculture cut off more than 80 percent of the former floodplains from the river, aggravating flooding throughout the basin.
- The destruction of more than 80 percent of the basin's wetlands, floodplains and forests has resulted in severe loss of the region's biodiversity.
- As part of the "Trans-European Transport Networks" the European Union is planning to significantly increase shipping on the Danube. The decision on how this is done – whether by fitting boats to the river, or the river to the boats – will have a crucial impact on the river's future.
- Rapid rural development under economic pressures has led to over-grazing, deforestation and erosion.