Emek Hefer

Background

The Emek Hefer Regional Council extends over 140,000 dunams, from the coastline in the west to the Shomron Mountains in the east. The Council is comprised of 44 small communities (moshavim, kibbutzim and villages), with a total population of 38,000 people. 90% of Emek Hefer’s land is presently in use, and 80% of its crops are watered with treated waste water. The Council is only 16 km wide and national infrastructure lines including major roads, train tracks, water ways, gas, sewage and electric lines pass through the district.

Situated east of Emek Hefer, in the drainage basin of the Alexander stream and above the Mountain Aquifer, is the Palestinian city Tul-Karem, with population of 90,000 residents. Emek Hefer Regional Council and its Palestinian neighbour Tul-Karem have been taking part in the “Good Waters Neighbors” project since 2001.

The Nablus stream, and its continuation, the Alexander stream, flow through areas of both communities on its way west to the sea. The Mountain Aquifer, an underground water resource shared by Israel and the Palestinian Authority, lies below Tul-Karem and Emek Hefer as well. These water resources, underground and above ground, are the main highest quality water resources of the entire area. However, today, the stream and the Mountain Aquifer are prone to pollution originating from both sides of the Green Line. As a result, there is reduction in the quality of water available to the two populations and the ecological system that it sustains.

The Emek Hefer Neighbors Path provides a glimpse into the community’s local water sources and its efforts to deal with waste management and sewage. In addition, the tour highlights the mutual dependency of the area’s transboundary water sources. The path brings us to several “green” initiatives, as well as areas of unresolved conflicts, and seeks to underline the connection between a healthy environment and neighborly relations. We hope that your participation in the tour will turn you into partners in our efforts to protect the Mountain Aquifer as an important water source and preserve crossboundary streams.

This trail is one of 25 paths or trails that deal with the issue of water and peace building between Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian communities that share a common water source. The routes were planned during 2007 in the framework of the “Good Water Neighbors” project in cooperation with community representatives as well as the municipalities.

The goals of the trails are to:
• Raise public awareness of shared water and environment concerns of the communities
• Promote cross border cooperation for solving environmental problems
• Develop the potential for local eco-tourism

The “Good Water Neighbors” project was established in 2001 by “EcoPeace / Friends of the Earth Middle East” in order to promote local cooperation efforts to protect the shared water and environment between Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority.

“EcoPeace / Friends of the Earth Middle East” is a regional environmental organization that works out of 3 offices, Tel Aviv, Amman and Bethlehem to promote cooperative efforts to protect our shared environmental heritage.

The brochure was written, updated and edited in March 2010 by Ayelet Tapiro and Michal Sagive.

Information about the rest of the “Neighbors Paths” can be found at: www.foeme.org

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The Path’s Stations

1. **Dohal overlook:** the Separation Barrier, Nablus stream, Yad Hannah Wastewater Treatment Plant and the city of Tulkarem

From the entrance to Bat Hefer continue straight, at the second traffic circle make a left turn. At a T junction turn right, to your left will be the Separation Barrier, continue straight all the way and park. Continue by foot heading south until you reach a sitting area made from recycled materials, the work of the youth of the town sponsored by the Town Committee and Friends of the Earth Middle East.

Beyond the Green Line, over 250,000 residents live on the slopes of the Shomron Mountains in the area of the Alexander Stream’s basin. The Nablus Stream (Wadi Zomer in Arabic) is the Alexander Stream’s main tributary, originating between the Grizim and Eival mountains. The Nablus Stream drains the Western Shomron area, crosses the Green Line near the city of Tulkarem, into Emek Hefer, Kibbutz Yad Hannah and Bat Hefer.

The Tulkarem area was once well known for its rich agriculture and comfortable natural conditions. 10 local wells supply the residents of Tulkarem with their drinking water, coming from the Mountain Aquifer. The Yad Hannah Plant treats the wastewater originating between the Grizim and Eival mountains.  The Nablus Stream (Wadi Zomer in Arabic) is the Alexander Stream’s main tributary, originating between the Grizim and Eival mountains. The Nablus Stream drains the Western Shomron area, crosses the Green Line near the city of Tulkarem, into Emek Hefer, Kibbutz Yad Hannah and Bat Hefer.

The Yad Hannah Wastewater Treatment Plant was established in the year 2000 as an emergency project in order to take care of the wastewater flowing in the Nablus Stream. Its cost is deducted by Israel from the tax refund to the Palestinian Authority. The Yad Hannah Plant treats the wastewater to a secondary level, and transfers it back to the Nablus stream in the summer and to Emek Hefer water reservoirs for irrigation in the winter. In order to upgrade the quality of the treated water to a tertiary level there are plans to build a constructed wetland nearby on 50 dunams of land. The German Agency for Development KFW is planning to invest 35 million Euro in the expansion of the sewage infrastructure in Tulkarem and its surroundings and in the building of a Wastewater Treatment Plant in Western Nablus. From this Plant treated water will be transferred to the Israeli side in the area of The Yad Hannah wastewater treatment plant.

2. **Bat Hefer Recycling Center**

In the center of the community village of Bat Hefer (home to 1400 families), a recycling center was established that receives, sorts and handles 22 different types of waste. This center is maintained and managed by a group of environmental trustees from the village and students from the nearby elementary school. In the school itself, there are several different ecological facilities such as a constructed wetland that purifies water from drinking water fountains for irrigation of a nearby orchard, lawns of synthetic grass and an educational farm for organic agriculture.

3. **“Kakoon” Fort**

On a hill overlooking the Emek Hefer landscape are the remains of the “Kakoon” Fort. Originally a Crusader Fort, its past glory lies buried in the remnants of the structure. This site was neglected for many years until it was rehabilitated by residents of the area, for the benefit of the public. From the fort one can view the Shomron Mountains to the east and the city of Tulkarem and its surroundings. Underneath this area is the Mountain Aquifer, which is Israel’s main underground water resource and the West Bank Palestinian’s only water source. In 1967, Israel took control of the entire Mountain Aquifer area, and water allocation to Palestinians has since been directed by the Civil Administration. A final agreement has not yet been reached in regards to water allocation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. In its absence, the intermediate agreement, signed as part of the Oslo Accords (1994) that was originally meant to be valid for a transfer period of five years, is still in place today. Presently, Israel pumps 80% of the aquifer’s water while the Palestinian Authority is allocated only 20%.

4. **The Emek Hefer Ecological Center: The Visitors center, overlook at the Agricultural Sludge Treatment Center and Reservoir (tours need to be coordinated in advance and for groups only)**

The Agricultural Sludge Treatment Center treats 750 tons of cattle mire everyday coming from 150 dairy barns in the area. The Center creates 13.5 cubic meters of biogas a day, providing 1.9 megawatts of electricity a year. This is the largest plant in the Middle East and the first of its kind in Israel. The importance of the treatment center is twofold: first, the prevention of ground pollution and water resources; and second, the saving of energy by the use of a greenhouse gas that would have otherwise been emitted into the atmosphere. In the future the treatment center will receive waste water from homes in Emek Hefer. There are plans to build a regional compost center nearby the treatment plant.

The northern reservoir, belonging to “Affikay Emek Hefer”, is one in a network of water reservoirs established in Emek Hefer to provide affordable treated wastewater for agriculture. The enterprise relies on wastewater from Netanya, Kfar-Yona, Emek Hefer villages, Tulkarem, collection of flood waters in the winter, and in total, supplies 20 million cubic meters of water per year that are returned to agricultural purposes. As one of the biggest water return enterprises in the world it provides the wastewater irrigation demands of Emek Hefer and of other northern regional councils. In Emek Hefer today, 80% of the agricultural crops are irrigated with recycled water.

In the visitors center you can watch a demonstration video and climb on the roof of the building for an overlook.

5. **Einot Hogla (Partridge Springs)**

It is recommended to walk from the 5th station to the 6th and enjoy nature, approximately a 20 minute walk.

In the beginning of the 19th century this entire area was covered by swamps. As a result of the public’s “green” pressure, the western pool will be preserved as a nature reserve.

6. **“The Love Tree”**

“The Love Tree” is a nickname for a large Eucalyptus tree found along the bank of the Alexander Stream. This particular spot, with its benches, shade and flowing stream, is located in one of the rehabilitated sections of the stream. This lovely area illustrates the potential beauty and enjoyment that nature can provide.

7. **“Ecological farm “The Old Dairy”**

An ecological farm was established in 2008 in an abandoned structure in the center of the town of Amatz, in order to promote the study of ecological and sustainable practices. The farm includes an organic vegetable garden and several domestic ecological facilities that demonstrate sustainable living. Advance notice is needed to visit the farm, partake in workshops, courses and Tabun meals. Tel: 077-4404890 www.ecolife.co.il

An abundance of rural and agricultural tourist attractions, as well as galleries and restaurants, await you all throughout Emek Hefer.

Local residents will be happy to host you!