The Dead Sea has been receding more than a meter per year over the last several years; today it measures 432 m below sea level. Division of the Lower Jordan River’s water and its main tributaries, primarily for agricultural use by Israel, Jordan and Syria (50%, 25% and 25% respectively), is the main reason for the declining water levels. In addition, activity of the Dead Sea mineral industries on both the Israeli and Jordanian sides, accelerate the evaporation of the sea’s waters and is responsible for 40% of the current water level drop.

The rapidly declining water level rates have created huge holes in the ground – called sinkholes. Sinkholes started appearing in the south of the Dead Sea and spread quickly to the north while existing holes simultaneously deepened and grew larger. Today approximately 2000 sinkholes are registered at 30 different sites, from Neve Zohar in the south to Einot Zin in the north. A similar phenomenon exists in Jordan, in the southern area. The sinkholes are dangerous to humans, infrastructure and future regional development. Sinkholes have a damaging effect on tourist activities on the Israeli side and farmland on the Jordanian side.

In order to illustrate the topographical change occurring over the last decades one only needs to look at the Ein Gedi Spa, originally built on the shores of the Dead Sea in the early 80’s. Today, the spa must transport its visitors by train more than 1 km to reach the beach.

Sinkholes and the Receding Dead Sea Level
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The ground, leading to a constantly rising water level at that site, threatening flooding in the surrounding area. Until today, the Israeli Dead Sea Works hasn’t harvested the salt residues in pool 5 but has instead built retaining curbs to contain the water and prevent flooding. As a result, the water level in evaporation pool 5, is higher than the ground floor of the local hotels!

A pumping station constantly pumps out water that threatens to flood the foundations of the hotels which mitigates but does not solve the problem. The looming threat of flooding to hotels and infrastructure has yet to be solved and is the reason for the establishment of the Dead Sea Preservation Government Company in 2008. This reality is an example of how the lack of an integrated management plan for the Dead Sea region has led to conflicting interests between the tourism and industrial sectors. A National Master Plan is currently being promoted, which is supposed to outline and integrate regional development.

The Israeli Dead Sea Works company has recently applied a request to create an additional evaporation pool, number 6, at the Lisan area. This request was denied in the past due to environmental organizations’ resistance. If approved, pool 6 will further accelerate the receding of the Dead Sea even further.

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Opposite us, on the Jordanian side of the sea, is the Massada.

Massada
The lower palm tree parking lot at the foot of the mountain.

On the southeastern side of the Dead Sea one can see the “Lisan” a peninsula that once divided the Dead Sea into the deeper northern basin and the shallower southern basin. Today the Lisan is the southern border of the sea. Waters in the southern basin have completely dried up. Nowadays, water is artificially pumped into evaporation pools in the southern basin to enable mineral extraction on the Israeli as well as on the Jordanian side. This process artificially accelerates the receding of the Dead Sea even further.

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Evaporation Pool 5 – Rising of the pool floor
North of the “Leonardo Plaza” Hotel at the southern tip of the Ein Bokek Hotels. Sign to pumping station Moriah. The Israeli and Jordanian industries that exploit the “Lisan” a peninsula that once divided the Dead Sea into the deeper northern basin and the shallower southern basin. Today the Lisan is the southern border of the sea. Waters in the southern basin have completely dried up. Nowadays, water is artificially pumped into evaporation pools in the southern basin to enable mineral extraction on the Israeli as well as on the Jordanian side. This process artificially accelerates the receding of the Dead Sea even further.

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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.

This leaflet was written, edited and updated on March 2010 by Gundy Shahal and Michal Sagive.

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

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The Tamar Regional Council includes the communities of Kibbutz Ein Gedi, Neve Zohar, Neot Hakkikar and Ein Tamar—approximately 1,200 residents altogether who earn their living mainly through agriculture and tourism. Across the border on the southern end of the Dead Sea lies the South Ghors Municipality of Jordan, consisting of several smaller agricultural communities: Ghor Safi, Ghor Mazraa, Ghor Haditheh and Ghor Fifa. The total population of the South Ghors Municipality is approximately 40,000.

The desert landscapes of the Dead Sea have undergone tremendous changes over the last few decades, threatening the area’s unique characteristics. Communities on both sides of the Sea are directly affected by the mismanagement of the Jordan River – Dead Sea ecosystems, resulting in the rapidly receding Dead Sea waters and the proliferation of sinkholes. These changes have severely damaged the environment and undermined economic opportunities for the local communities on both sides of Dead Sea’s border.

This walking trail, prepared for you by residents of the area with the support of ‘Friends of the Earth Middle East’, exhibits the unique natural features and heritage of the region. Our Jordanian neighbors are operating a parallel neighbor’s path trail and we will be able to view their communities as we proceed with this tour. We hope that after participating in this tour all of you will fully realize the importance and urgency of joining our efforts to save this remarkable spot on the globe.