



## **Regional Update: 2010-2016**

### **Why Cooperate Over Water?**

#### **Jordan River**

- In 2013, after a decade of successful public advocacy, the Israeli Government decided to release fresh water into the Lower Jordan River for the first time in the past 49 years. In addition, the Israeli Water Authority has committed to increase this allocation from 9 million cubic meters (MCM) to 30 MCM. There are discussions in 2016 being held to increase the allocation to the river to 60 MCM annually.
- Wastewater treatment plants are either completed or being built in the vicinity of the Jordan Valley by Israel, Jordan, and Palestine. The implementation of these sanitation solutions will remove some of the major sources of sewage from the Lower Jordan River. Additional treatment plants and collection networks still need to be built on the Jordanian and Palestinian sides of the valley and solutions need to be found for the pollution from extensive fish farming on the Israeli side
- EcoPeace Middle East launched a unique faith-based campaign to rehabilitate the Lower Jordan River. We lead tours of the Jordan River for Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities from Jordan, Palestine, Israel, and abroad. Approximately 1,500 faith leaders have participated in the Jordan River tours to date.
- Following three years of an EU-funded research program, together with consortium partners at the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI) and Global Nature Fund (GNF), EcoPeace launched the first ever Regional NGO Master Plan for Sustainable Development in the Jordan Valley in June 2015. The document identifies 127 interventions, that address a broad range of developmental goals. Though an NGO vision document with no statutory powers, the document builds on an Israeli government's master planning process and has gained official support of Jordanian and Palestinian officials and the interest of the international community. A short list of priority interventions has been prepared, and is currently advocated vis a vis the region's governments and potential donor countries and institutions.
- EcoPeace hired the Stockholm International Water Institute to research possible governance options for the Jordan Valley. The report will be released at a major conference to be held in November 2016.

#### **Dead Sea**

- Much due to EcoPeace Middle East's work, there is now large public recognition that the diversion of waters from the Jordan River and industry use of the Sea are the driving forces for the decline of the Dead Sea.
- In 2013, the World Bank Study of Alternatives echoed our position that the Jordan River can be rehabilitated and the Dead Sea stabilized by alternative means that are far less harmful than the proposed Red Sea-Dead Sea Conduit.
- EcoPeace successfully publicized the fact that the mineral extraction industries along the Dead Sea are not paying for the water they pump into industrial evaporation ponds, creating no incentive for the

industry to adopt less harmful and more water efficient technologies. As a result, both the Israel Environment Ministry and the Jordan Valley Authority have called for a water charge to be advanced.

## **Mountain and Coastal Aquifers**

- Just prior to the 2014 Israel/Hamas hostilities, EcoPeace Middle East issued a report on the severity of the water and sanitation crisis facing Palestinian residents of the Gaza Strip. We launched a highly successful campaign to provide an emergency supply of water for the Palestinian community of Abassan (one of EcoPeace's Good Water Neighbors' partner communities) and called for interim measures to be advanced to avoid the likelihood of an outbreak of pandemic disease.
- In August, 2014, following the war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, EcoPeace and the Institute for National Security Studies issued a report concerning Gaza's water, sanitation and energy crises, emphasizing the possible dire health and security implications for Palestinians and Israelis alike. The report was circulated widely amongst Israeli decision makers and international community representatives in the region and overseas.
- In early 2015, the Israeli Government agreed to increase the volume of water sold to Gaza from 5 to 10 mcm, in accordance with the provisions of the 1995 Oslo Agreement (Oslo II). EcoPeace is currently advocating for a further increase of that volume, from 10 to 20 mcm, and is advocating for the building of the necessary infrastructure needed to receive this additional water on the Gaza side.
- The Mountain Aquifer as a whole is less threatened by over-extraction. Israel, which formerly was primarily responsible for the over-exploitation of the Mountain Aquifer, is far less dependent on the Mountain Aquifer due to increased dependence on seawater desalination.
- Through the Protecting Groundwater program, EcoPeace created Hazard Reduction and Prevention guidelines to empower municipalities to more effectively ensure the sustainability of groundwater resources. In addition, we trained municipal staff and local volunteers to identify and report on pollution. Through both the Water Cannot Wait and Good Water Neighbors projects, EcoPeace is helping advance sanitation solutions that will prevent pollution to the aquifer, among other sources.

## **Water in the Peace Process: Support for More Equitable Allocations of Water**

- EcoPeace published a Model Water Agreement between Israel and Palestine. Based on the principles of joint management, the Model Water Agreement is an alternate final status water agreement that meets the needs of both countries and advances a two-state solution.
- In 2012, we launched the Water Cannot Wait campaign seeking to educate peace negotiators, decision makers and the general public as to the opportunities of advancing water issues in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. In the years since, we have adapted the project to the changing political reality (e.g. the launch of US-led peace talks and their collapse in 2013, the war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza) and in the process succeeded in making prevalent the notion that water is potentially a political game changer for the region.
- In response to the 2013 MoU signed between Israel and Jordan to trade water, EcoPeace launched a research study to advance a water and energy nexus (WEN) among Israel, Palestine, and Jordan in which solar energy produced mostly in Jordan could power enough seawater desalination on the coasts of Israel and Gaza to meet the water needs of all three countries. High level presentations of early research have been given both in the region and internationally, with the final report to be released at a conference to be held in November 2016.

## **Promoting Environmental Education: EcoParks and Cultural Heritage Sites**

- EcoPeace successfully established three community-based EcoParks: Sharhabil Bin Hassneh in Jordan, Ein Gedi EcoCenter in Israel, and the Auja Environmental Center in Palestine. These parks serve as models for preserving biodiversity and ecologically important habitats, as well as provide spaces for environmental education and nature appreciation.
- EcoPeace continues to advance its vision to create a Peace Park along the Jordan River. The government of Jordan has created a working committee to advance a national park in Bakoura on their side of the Jordan River and in Israel new investments are taking place in both Naharyim and Gesher sites along the river.
- In June, 2014, UNESCO registered Battir, a Palestinian village home to a system of irrigated terraces from the Roman era, as a World Heritage site in danger. The route for the Separation Barrier proposed by the Israeli military runs through the Battir terraces. EcoPeace managed to convince the Israeli Nature and Parks Authority to object to the building of the barrier and obtained an interim injunction by the High Court of Israel to stop the advance of the barrier. In January 2015 following two years of deliberations the High Court decided to deny the request of the Israeli Military to confirm the legality of the proposed route of the Separation Barrier , effectively stopping the barrier from being built in that area.
- EcoPeace established the Youth Water Trustees Alumni Program as part of its Good Water Neighbors (GWN) Project's educational component in Israel, Palestine and Jordan. Alumni are being trained to help EcoPeace staff and community coordinators in youth water trustees' activities, and have so far represented EcoPeace in delegations to Japan, South Korea, and Brussels. They give interviews to the national media in their respective countries and lead local campaigns in their communities.

***For more information on our projects and publications, and how you can both be involved and directly help us advance our mission please visit our website at: [www.foeme.org](http://www.foeme.org).***