



The Water Imperative

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Canada and the United States are regarded as the most extravagant wasters of water in the world—consuming roughly 350 liters a day, per person. Twenty to 40 liters is all that is required for drinking and sanitation.

Wherever the human race has roamed, be it across oceans, continents, or into the depths of space, we are forever searching for the presence of water: clean water, plentiful water. In its abundance, civilizations have flourished. In its absence, life has withered.

Should it not amaze us that Earth alone is the only planet for several million light years in any given direction that has the right combination of water, atmosphere, and proximity to its sun to support life? As far as we've yet been able to see, we're it. If you want a cold drink, stay close to home.

Degraded Water Sources a Prevalent Problem

Unfortunately, for many of us, our local water supplies need help. Some have been dwindling due to prolonged drought or from population expansion and development without thought of resource availability. Many of our lakes, streams, and rivers are less than pristine, polluted with the byproducts of industry, agriculture, and our daily actions.

Securing clean, high quality water is a basic necessity. Yet, according to the World Health Organization, 1.1 billion people do not have access to improved drinking water services; 2.2 million people die yearly from diseases associated with lack of safe drinking water, inadequate sanitation, and poor hygiene. We've been spoiled in North America—99.9 percent of us have access to clean water and sanitation. Still, when our reservoirs look like mud flats and our streams run full with sediment or bacteria, it's time to make some changes.

A Question of Sustainability

Is access to water a basic human right? Should water be a privately owned commodity, removed from one area and sold to another by transnational corporations, with the help of diversion dams, tankers, pipelines, and one liter plastic bottles? Should water, like air and sunshine, remain an essentially free, shared common good? What is the price of keeping water clean, of repairing aging infrastructure, and protecting water supplies? What will it take for us to change our water use habits and eliminate wasteful practices and pollution?

“When you look out the other way toward the stars you realize it’s an awful long way to the next watering hole.”

**Loren Acton,
Astronaut Challenger 8
July 1985**

These are questions of sustainability. Our ultimate challenge is keeping water healthy and plentiful to sustain life in all its spectacular variety. Are we willing to make a commitment to achieve that end?

As an organization dedicated to helping people help the environment, Audubon International has set water conservation and water quality protection and improvement among its highest priorities. We ask our members to do the same.

Together, we have restored and protected wetlands, lakes, and aquifers that store water and recharge water supplies. We have helped people monitor water quality and clean up local waterways. We have sought alternative supplies and helped people increase the use of wastewater to reduce demand for potable water. Now, we must redouble our efforts to achieve sustainable water systems.

We think it can be done—one household, one stream, one watershed at a time.

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