


Freshwater species and ecosystems provide services we depend upon for our survival—but their future remains at risk. Conservation International (CI) is delivering solutions to restore the health of vital freshwater ecosystems and ensure that people and freshwater-dependent species can survive and thrive, both now and in the future.

one solution: **manage**

what do we mean by *manage*?

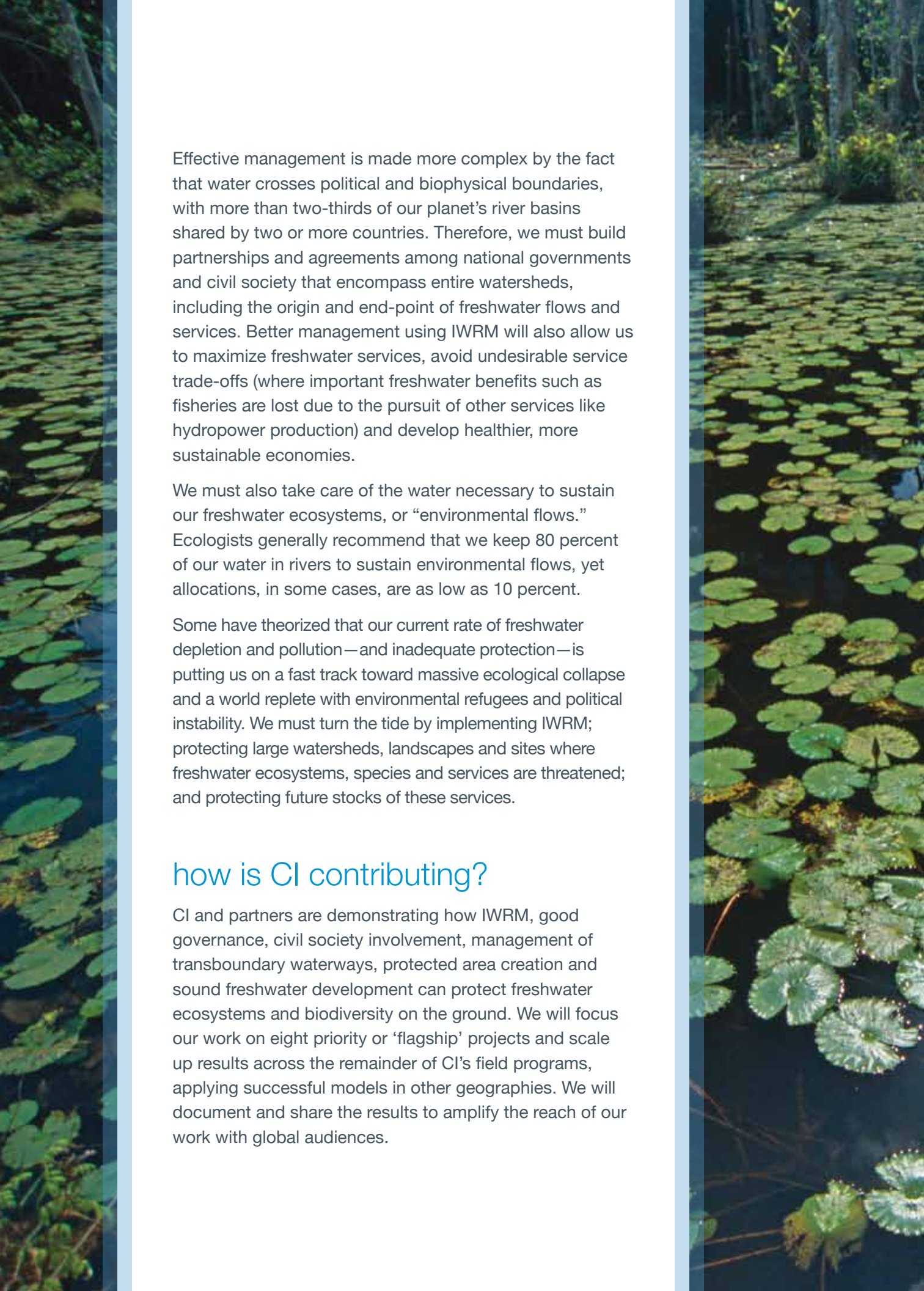


As a natural resource essential to life on Earth, fresh water must be managed in a way that meets human and species needs alike. Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) is a framework that takes into account social, political, environmental and economic factors to best allocate and manage fresh water given the multiple and competing demands on this resource. IWRM engages communities, governments and other stakeholders in transparent decision-making processes that balance competing water needs, enhance governance and ensure equitable access to water resources.

why is it important?

Freshwater ecosystems and biodiversity are not sufficiently protected. There are currently some 126,000 freshwater-dependent species across the planet, whose future remains uncertain. Although 1,218 inland wetland sites have been designated—mostly under the international Ramsar convention—designation alone does not ensure the protection of freshwater biodiversity. Effective management and financing is necessary across these critical ecosystems and watersheds to ensure the provision of fresh water when and where people and species need it. There are also vast areas of freshwater wilderness requiring sound and careful management to preserve global stocks of freshwater resources.

manage



Effective management is made more complex by the fact that water crosses political and biophysical boundaries, with more than two-thirds of our planet's river basins shared by two or more countries. Therefore, we must build partnerships and agreements among national governments and civil society that encompass entire watersheds, including the origin and end-point of freshwater flows and services. Better management using IWRM will also allow us to maximize freshwater services, avoid undesirable service trade-offs (where important freshwater benefits such as fisheries are lost due to the pursuit of other services like hydropower production) and develop healthier, more sustainable economies.

We must also take care of the water necessary to sustain our freshwater ecosystems, or “environmental flows.” Ecologists generally recommend that we keep 80 percent of our water in rivers to sustain environmental flows, yet allocations, in some cases, are as low as 10 percent.

Some have theorized that our current rate of freshwater depletion and pollution—and inadequate protection—is putting us on a fast track toward massive ecological collapse and a world replete with environmental refugees and political instability. We must turn the tide by implementing IWRM; protecting large watersheds, landscapes and sites where freshwater ecosystems, species and services are threatened; and protecting future stocks of these services.

how is CI contributing?

CI and partners are demonstrating how IWRM, good governance, civil society involvement, management of transboundary waterways, protected area creation and sound freshwater development can protect freshwater ecosystems and biodiversity on the ground. We will focus our work on eight priority or ‘flagship’ projects and scale up results across the remainder of CI's field programs, applying successful models in other geographies. We will document and share the results to amplify the reach of our work with global audiences.



the flagship sites where we will work include:

- Drylands and forested watersheds in the North and Eastern Capes, South Africa;
- Okavango River and its, Southern Africa;
- Eastern escarpment watersheds and wetlands, Madagascar;
- Atlantic Forest in the highly populous states of Rio and Sao Paulo, Brazil;
- Alpine meadows of the Andes, Colombia;
- Sources and flows of Asia's major rivers in the Qinghai Province and the Sichuan basin, China;
- Mekong River flows and Tonle Sap fisheries, Cambodia; and
- Ridge to estuary freshwater flows, Fiji.

CI's niche

- Ensuring that water allocation, governance, policies, institutions and financing are in place to secure equitable access, sound water resource management, environmental flows and biodiversity conservation.
- Implementing integrated watershed resource management pilot projects across globally critical landscapes and watersheds to ensure equitable access and to protect freshwater ecosystems, service provision and environmental flows.
- Protecting and restoring large watersheds, landscapes, and sites and integrating fresh water into CI's overall body of work—by applying the best science, planning, policy and market engagement and on-the-ground action.



For more information, contact:

Tracy Farrell, Senior Director, Freshwater Initiative; tfarrell@conservation.org

www.conservation.org | **people need nature to thrive**

PHOTOS LEFT TO RIGHT: © CI / PHOTO BY RUSSELL A. MITTMEIER, © CI / PHOTO BY JOHN MARTIN

results expected

- At least 20 percent of the world's realized freshwater services are sustained and at least 20 percent of the potential services stocks for future generations are secured in biodiversity hotspots and wilderness areas.
- At least 17 percent of inland water and terrestrial ecoregions and key biodiversity areas, where biodiversity is most threatened and concentrated, are protected under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity.
- Cross-boundary water management and governance are enhanced in CI flagship projects and other other CI field programs by working with these governments to ratify the UN Watercourses Convention.
- Strengthened regional and national water policies and river basin/watershed institutions to help countries adapt to climate change, maintain environmental flows and establish sound IWRM programs.
- Landscapes, watersheds and production areas are protected and managed, from ridge to estuary, in CI flagship projects by developing science, tools and policy; engaging with markets; and conducting other activities including sustainable financing. This work will result in documented species conservation and human well-being benefits.

priorities

- Helping freshwater flagship projects and CI country programs implement National Biodiversity Action Plans and strategies and committing to national protected area targets as part of the Convention on Biological Diversity.
- Advising Liberia, Costa Rica and other CI countries that have yet to ratify the UN Watercourses Convention, by conducting feasibility studies on ratification and working with governments to advocate for ratification.
- Implementing ecosystem-based adaptation projects that show how taking better care of our planet's freshwater ecosystems improves resiliency and reduces the vulnerability of human and species populations to climate change.