

for financing necessary projects. Global water policy organizations, such as the World Water Council, are dominated by these major water and other corporations. Even in developed countries, municipalities have been pressured to sell their public water and sewerage operations for financial reasons. These corporations are exploiting the most vulnerable people and nations for their own profits as high prices are extracted for water. The more water is used, the more money they make, so fixing leaks is not in their best interest.

Countering this focus on water as a commodity is a movement to declare water and sanitation a human right. On July 28th, 2010, the United Nations General Assembly voted unanimously (124 nations in favor with 42 abstentions) for a resolution that declared water and sanitation to be a human right.

Water is a spiritual resource.

Our health and well being as individuals and communities is integrally tied to water. As fetuses we are cradled in warm, supportive fluid. Hearing the music of a flowing stream or seeing the shimmer of reflections on a quiet lake bring about a sense of peace.

The spiritual connection between water and life is manifested in religious practices around the world. The Ganges is sacred to Hindus; Muslims purify before prayer by a practice called “wudhu”; Buddhists place bowls of water on their home shrines to represent clarity and as an offering of thirst quenching water to all beings; and many Christians baptize with water.

In recreation, too, water plays a role. In the summer we go to the pool, lake, or beach to swim—to be immersed in water. In the winter we go skiing or ice skating to glide over frozen water.

As Friends we rely on inward leadings to guide us in our actions. The looming problems before us will require all of our spiritual discernment. Let us open ourselves to what the Inward light reveals.

What Can Friends Do?

- 1) Lobby for water as a human right.
- 2) Resist privatization of your water supply.
- 3) Don't buy or drink bottled water.
- 4) Learn the source of your water.
- 5) Learn about local water use for business, industry, and agriculture.
- 6) Organize worship-sharing about people's experiences with water.
- 7) Learn how to use less water.

RESOURCES

Website:

Food and Water Watch <foodandwaterwatch.org>

Films:

Gasland (HBO, Directed by Josh Fox, 2010)

Thirst: The Film (Directed by Alan Snitow and Deborah Kaufman, 2009)

FLOW: How Did a Handful of Corporations Steal Our Water? (Directed by Irena Salina, 2008)

Blue Gold: World Water Wars (Directed by Sam Bozzo, 2008)

Running Dry (Directed by Jim Thebaut, 2005)

Poisoned Waters (*Frontline*, PBS, Directed by Rich Young, 2009)

Books:

Gleick, Peter H. (2009) *The World's Water*, Washington: Island Press

Barlow, Maude (2007) *Blue Covenant*, New York: The New Press

Schwenk, Theodor, Wolfram Schwenk, and Marjorie Spock (1989). *Water: The Element of Life*, Herndon, Virginia: Steiner Books

Quaker Earthcare Witness, 2010

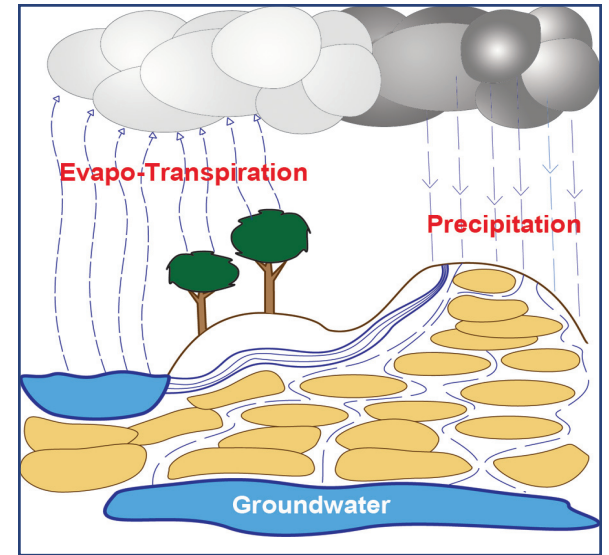
info@QuakerEarthcare.org www.QuakerEarthcare.org

WE WORK to integrate into the beliefs and practices of the Religious Society of Friends the Truth that God's Creation is to be respected, protected, and held in reverence in its own right and the Truth that human aspirations for peace and justice depend upon restoring the earth's ecological integrity.

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Water is Life

Life on Earth is not possible without water, but access to clean, fresh water is threatened.



We live on the blue planet; the surface is mostly water.

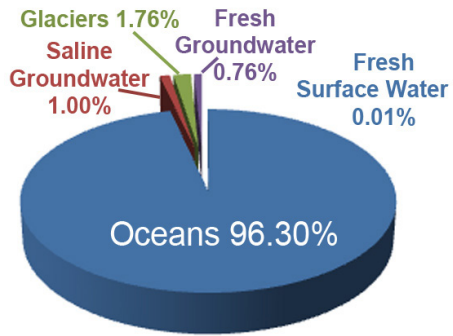
Humans are mostly (70%) water, and so are all the other living creatures.

Water is the ultimate renewable resource, an essential part of our common resources—the commons.

Access to clean fresh water is a human right, not as some corporations say, a commodity to be sold.

How can we conserve, preserve, and share fairly Earth's water?

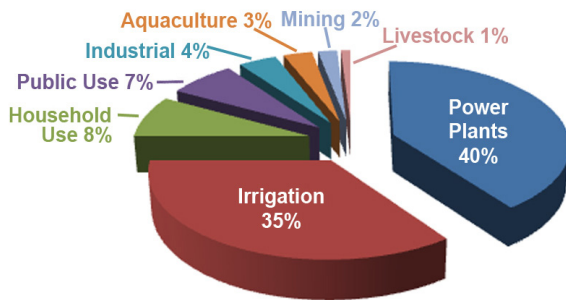
Water on Earth.



Most (97.3%) of the water on Earth is in our oceans and salty groundwater. And most of the fresh water is locked in glaciers (1.8%). This means that less than one percent of the world's total water, the freshwater in rivers, lakes, wetlands, and some underground aquifers, is accessible to sustain all life outside the oceans.

How do we use water?

Three-quarters of the water we use in the U.S. goes for power plants and irrigation. Other uses such as household, industrial, and public uses make up the other quarter.



Water is renewable.

In the natural process, all freshwater is renewed through the hydrologic cycle. Water vapor in the atmosphere is generated from two sources, jointly called “evapo-transpiration:”

- 1) Energy from the sun causes surface water to evaporate, and

- 2) Plants transpire, also producing water vapor using energy from the sun.

As air masses are transported around the earth, they cool, the water vapor condenses and gravity causes it to fall back to Earth as rain, snow, sleet, or hail. Some water seeps into the ground, re-charging groundwater, and some runs off into wetlands, lakes, and rivers, and eventually to the oceans.

We have polluted, diverted, and depleted our Earth's water.

But the living creatures on Earth are running out of clean fresh water because humans have polluted, diverted, and depleted it. Sources of pollution include pesticide and fertilizer wastes from growing our food, chemical wastes from industrial production of things we use, chemical and thermal pollution from production of energy for our activities, and our own wastes in the form of sewage, garbage, and trash. The toxic chemicals used in hydraulic fracturing to extract natural gas are a serious threat to both surface and groundwater quality.

Since sources of water are not necessarily where the human need for water occurs, we divert it through huge piping systems to reach human settlements. For agriculture and industrial uses, water is pumped out of the ground at faster rates than it can recharge. Water is now even bottled for sale, with around 53 billion gallons consumed each year. Dams interrupt the natural flow of rivers to make large reservoirs for water supply and generation of electricity.

Rivers run dry.

The result of all this is that major rivers—the Yellow in China, Indus in India, Nile in Egypt, Rio Grande, and Colorado in North America, to name a few—no longer flow to the sea. The water is diverted, producing dry river beds and dry deltas. Forty percent of the world's human population lives in river basins with water scarcity, where more than 75% of the water is withdrawn. In 2010 humans were appropriating half of all freshwater flows for their own use.

Human population is increasing.

The increasing human population places increasing pressure on all resources, especially water. More than one billion people have no access to clean drinking water. When forests are cut down to raise cattle for human consumption and to grow biofuels for our cars, that deforestation reduces plant transpiration and rainfall while increasing temperature.

Water delivers the effects of climate change.

Most inevitable effects of climate disruption are manifested in the behavior of water. Increasing global temperature causes more intense storms, more severe and permanent drought in some areas, and more intense and frequent flooding in others. This is happening now in North America and elsewhere.

Warming and changes in precipitation patterns are causing glaciers to recede. Large populations are dependent upon glacier melt for their water supply. As glaciers disappear, large areas of desert form where people, plants, and animals once thrived.

Human right or a commodity?

Public water supply and sewage disposal systems were developed in the nineteenth century for the protection of public health in most European and North American cities. However, in France a private water industry developed around two major companies that have now evolved into the two most powerful water transnational corporations, Suez and Veolia. In 1989 the British privatized their water systems, which led to the third largest water corporation, British-German RWE Thames.

By the 1990s the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) had adopted what has been called “the Washington Consensus,” a financial reform prescription for developing countries based upon privatization of public services, including water supply and sanitation. This has been imposed upon impoverished developing countries as a condition