Water, biodiversity and climate : three components of the living world's resilience

Messages from the French Water Partnership for the IUCN World Conservation Congress

(October 9-15, 2025, Abu Dhabi)

IUCN World Conservation Congress Abu Dhabi 2025

french water partnership

fwp pfe

partenariat français pour l'eau

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United Nations. (2024). *Sustainable Development Goals Report*

SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation): In 2022, about

half of the world's population experienced severe water scarcity

for at least part of the year, and a quarter were exposed to "extremely high" levels of water stress.

United Nations. (2024). *Sustainable Development Goals Report*

SDG 13 (climate action): In 2022, global greenhouse gas emissions **a record level of**

57.4 gigatons CO_2 equivalent.

UNEP. *Emissions Gap Report 2023.*

ODD 15 (life on land) : Between 2000 and 2020,

a net loss of nearly 100 million hectares of forest occurred.

United Nations. (2024). *Sustainable Development Goals Report*

KEY ASPECTS

The IUCN World Conservation Congress, which will be held in Abu Dhabi from October 9 to 15, 2025, is taking place in a global context of accelerating environmental degradation[1]*. However, biodiversity preservation, sustainable water management and socio-ecosystem resilience are effective and interdependent tools for setting our societies on a truly positive path for all life.*

The Congress is a pivotal event on the international agenda, building on the momentum created by COP16 of the Convention on Biological Diversity and taking place in the run-up to COP30 of the Framework Convention on Climate Change, where the role of biodiversity and water in adapting to climate change is increasingly being recognized.

As such, it offers a crucial moment for dialog on international biodiversity and climate agendas, consistent with the Nexus approach highlighted by the latest IPBES report (Tackle Together Five Interlinked Global Crises in Biodiversity, Water, Food, Health and Climate Change, December 2024).

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1. United Nations. (2024). *Sustainable Development Goals Report*

Only 17% of SDG targets are on track, while nearly half show minimal or moderate progress, and progress on over a third has stalled or even regressed. Among the goals most affected by environmental degradation and its socio-economic impacts are SDGs 6, 13 and 15, which are significantly behind schedule.

- SDG 13 (climate action): In 2022, global greenhouse gas emissions reached a record level of 57.4 gigatons CO_2 equivalent, according to the UNEP Emissions Gap Report 2023.
- SDG 15 (life on land): Between 2000 and 2020, a net loss of nearly 100 million hectares of forest occurred.
- SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation): In 2022, about half of the world's population experienced severe water scarcity for at least part of the year, and a quarter were exposed to "extremely high" levels of water stress.

IPBES Report. G*lobal Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystem*.
https://www.ipbes.net/news/Media-Release-Global-Assessment
PBES estimates that approximately 1 million species are at risk of extinction.

The members of the French Water Partnership (FWP) call on the IUCN Secretariat, its expert commissions and all its members **to work toward better integrating the link between water, biodiversity, and climate in public policies and international commitments** through five priorities:

1 *Mobilize ambitious funding for biodiversity.*

↘ To this end, redirect harmful subsidies to preserve the balance of the water cycle.

☑ It is absolutely imperative to increase biodiversity-friendly investments and reform the financing that contributes to environmental degradation[2], greenhouse gas emissions and disruption of the water cycle whose balance underpins healthy ecosystems. Targets 18 and 19 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework provide an ambitious goal: **by 2030, achieve the revision of the allocation of at least $500 billion per year in harmful subsidies and mobilize $200 billion per year for biodiversity.**

☑ Implementing a twin-pronged approach, combining efforts to reform harmful incentives and increase support for water-related Nature-Based Solutions, is essential to preserve ecosystem functions, strengthen adaptation to climate change, ensure a just ecological transition and limit the socio-economic risks arising from biodiversity loss[3].

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2. OECD. (2020). *A Comprehensive Overview of Global Biodiversity Finance.* **https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2020/04/a-comprehensive-overview-of-global-biodiversity-finance_ad660ace/25f9919e-en.pdf**
In 2020, the OECD estimated that government support that could harm biodiversity amounted to $500 billion per year.

WWF. (2024). Living Planet Report 2024.
https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-10/living-planet-report-2024.pdf
Other estimates, such as from WWF (2024), put the figure at nearly $7 trillion per year across all environmentally damaging subsidies (including fossil energy, agriculture, fisheries, and transport).
The discrepancies between estimates lead to confusion, hindering the rollout of regular, targeted funding for biodiversity.

3. Julie Maurin, Julien Calas, Antoine Godin et al. (2022). "Quels impacts socioéconomiques liés à la perte de biodiversité dans les scénarios de biodiversité mondiaux ?" ["What socio-economic impacts are linked to biodiversity loss in global biodiversity scenarios?"] p. 1-43

Among Nature-Based Solutions that offer co-benefits for biodiversity, climate, soil health and the functioning of the water cycle, wetland restoration requires priority focus. Since 1900, between 64 and 71% of this habitat has disappeared globally (Davidson, 2014).

The FWP calls on States to join initiatives such as the Mangrove Alliance for Climate, and the Mangrove Breakthrough which aims to restore 15 million hectares of mangrove by 2030 through sustainable management involving local communities, while ensuring sustainable funding. (Global Mangrove Alliance estimates $4 billion will be needed by 2030.)

Since 1900, between 64 and 71% of this habitat has disappeared globally

(Davidson, 2014).

2

Preserve freshwater ecosystems, major centers of biodiversity that often cross boundaries, and strengthen international cooperation around watersheds to maintain water bodies – surface water and groundwater – and their associated ecosystems in good condition with a view to climate resilience.

To this end, encourage States to accede to the two international conventions on transboundary waters, in particular the 1992 Water Convention and the 1997 UN Watercourses Convention.

Although they represent less than 1% of the Earth's surface, **freshwater ecosystems are home to more than 10% of known species, a testament to their exceptional biodiversity.** However, according to the 2024 biodiversity-focused Indicator 6.6.1 progress report, 50% of countries have one or more water-related ecosystem type in a state of degradation[4].

4. A figure representing more than 90 of the 185 countries that shared data on SDG Indicator 6.6.1.

Their functions are all the more essential in crisis and fragile contexts marked by food and nutritional insecurity (**see the insert on the next page on** ***"Water, biodiversity, and climate: what are the challenges for humanitarian action?"***).

Transboundary freshwater ecosystems require special attention: **they represent 313 river and lake basins, 300 transboundary wetlands, including 22 Ramsar sites, and 6000 shared aquifers. Home to 52% of the world's population, these spaces are essential drivers of environmental cooperation[5].**

Strengthen international cooperation and accede to the two United Nations Conventions on transboundary waters: the 1992 Water Convention[6] and the 1997 UN Watercourses Convention[7]. These universal, complementary legal instruments facilitate cooperation on sustainable management of shared freshwaters, ecosystem preservation, climate resilience, and sustainable development. They codify customary principles of international water law and encourage the development of regional and sub-regional legal frameworks that reconcile fair use of water as a resource, protection of its quality and quantity, and maintenance of transboundary water resources' ecological functions. In addition, through its institutional mechanism, the Water Convention provides a unique intergovernmental framework that encourages continuous dialog and supports legal and institutional reforms for better water governance at the national, regional, and global levels.

3 *Strengthen coordination of the management of inland, coastal and marine waters,*

building on the momentum generated at the Third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC-3).

We call for the orientations and policies put forward by IUCN and its members to promote a systemic approach that takes account of ecological continuity between aquatic environments and ensures coordination in their management to better serve biodiversity and climate action.

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5. Hoofman Rosenblum Z. et Schmeier S. "Global Wetland Governance: Introducing the Transboundary Wetlands Database". *Water.* **(2022).** 14(19). 3077. **https://doi.org/10.3390/w14193077**

6. UNECE. (2013). *Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes* **https://unece.org/environment-policy/publications/convention-protection-and-use-transboundary-watercourses-and**

7. United Nations. (2014). *Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses* **https://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/conventions/8_3_1997.pdf**

Water, biodiversity, and climate: what are the challenges for humanitarian action?

Climate and environmental crises amplify populations' vulnerability, particularly in terms of water and nutrition, and do so all the more severely in conflict or disaster situations—a problem faced by the FWP working group on WaSH in crisis and fragile contexts.

Aquatic ecosystems play a fundamental role in populations' food and nutritional security by supporting irrigated agriculture, artisanal fishing, livestock farming, and access to drinking water. Their degradation directly compromises communities' livelihoods, health, and resilience, especially in humanitarian crises exacerbated by climate stress.

Supporting Nature-Based Solutions (NBSs), such as agroecology and agroforestry, simultaneously strengthens the resilience of aquatic ecosystems, food systems and nutritional security. These practices, which enable soil restoration and recharge of the most superficial groundwater, promote the production of a diverse range of nutritious food that is adapted to local conditions, while reducing dependence on chemical inputs and unsustainable or unsuitable agricultural systems in arid or degraded areas.

Humanitarian funding often remains disconnected from biodiversity and ecological resilience issues. However, an effective and sustainable response to the five crises highlighted by the IPBES Nexus assessment report requires full integration of humanitarian and food and nutrition security issues into Biodiversity, Climate, and Water funding—and vice versa—to strengthen community resilience in the face of environmental and climate crises.

An effective and sustainable response to the five crises highlighted by the IPBES Nexus assessment report requires full integration of humanitarian and food and nutrition security issues into Biodiversity, Climate, and Water funding—and vice versa.

4 *Build on the principles of IUCN Motion 078 sponsored by the FWP*

↳ to use agroecology and agroforestry as strategic tools to restore soil's ecological functions and regulate the water cycle.

The FWP reiterates the urgency of recognizing the crucial role of practices based on soil biological processes, such as mycorrhizal or agroforestry systems, within agricultural, climate, biodiversity, and water policies. These approaches improve water infiltration and retention, reduce erosion and support soil biodiversity, all of which are prerequisites for local resilience in the face of climate change. (**See the insert on next page on** *"The water–soil–agriculture nexus: a tool supporting biodiversity, food security, climate action, and sustainable development."*). They contribute more broadly to the emergence of agricultural and food systems that respect the biosphere and bring cross-sectoral synergies in line with the "One Health" approach[8].

5 *Develop an international framework for the preservation of watershed heads*

that facilitates the exchange of best practices and the rollout of targeted policies. (in accordance with Motion 021).

The FWP calls for the establishment of an international operational framework (exchanging best practices, rolling out of targeted policies by States, etc.) aimed at protecting and restoring watershed heads, the points at which rivers originate, which are crucial for water quality, biodiversity, and climate regulation. Preserving these sensitive ecosystems, which ensure the ecological integrity of the watercourses that depend on them, must be integrated into public policies and benefit from targeted funding, improvement goals supported by international and national indicators, and sustainable management frameworks adapted to local climatic conditions, particularly in arid and semi-arid areas.

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8. WHO's One Health concept: **WHO. One Health. (2023).** **https://www.who.int/fr/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/one-health**

The water–soil–agriculture nexus: a tool supporting biodiversity preservation, food security, climate action, and sustainable development

Without water, it is impossible to have living soil, agriculture, or biodiversity

Soil stores more carbon than the atmosphere and vegetation combined and their very rich biodiversity (more than a quarter of terrestrial biodiversity) is fundamental to life on earth, food security, climate action, and water. Conserving soil and improving its ecological and agronomic properties increases its fertility and its ability to retain water and carbon and strengthens local resilience against droughts, excess water, and pathogens, while also reducing erosion and demand for irrigation water, promoting infiltration into groundwater, limiting the risk of flooding, and increasing soil's ability to treat pollutants.

The French Water Partnership calls for the interfacing of water, biodiversity and climate, and agriculture policies to make the water-soil-agriculture nexus an essential linchpin for preserving and restoring the living world to help achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It therefore highlights the need to include soil in policy discourse on water and biodiversity and the importance of agroecological approaches such as agroforestry, sustainable irrigation

Without water, it is impossible to have living soil, agriculture, or biodiversity

HIGHLIGHTS OF ...

the French Water Partnership's key messages for the IUCN World Conservation Congress

1. ***Mobilize ambitious funding for biodiversity.***
   ↘ To this end, redirect harmful subsidies to preserve the balance of the water cycle.

2. ***Preserve freshwater ecosystems, major centers of biodiversity that often cross boundaries, and strengthen international cooperation around watersheds to maintain water bodies – surface water and groundwater – and their associated ecosystems in good condition***
   ↘ To this end, encourage States to accede to the two international conventions on transboundary waters, in particular the 1992 Water Convention and the 1997 UN Watercourses Convention.

3. ***Strengthen coordination of the management of inland, coastal and marine waters,*** , building on the momentum generated at the Third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC-3).

4. ***Build on the principles of IUCN Motion 078 sponsored by the FWP***
   ↘ to use agroecology and agroforestry as strategic tools to restore soil's ecological functions and regulate the water cycle.

5. ***Develop an international framework for the preservation of watershed heads*** that facilitates the exchange of best practices and the rollout of targeted policies (in accordance with Motion 021).

Participate in our sessions at the IUCN World Conservation Congress

Session on the France Pavilion

> Saturday, October 11, from 1:00 to 2:00 PM

From Freshwater Ecosystem Conservation to Green Water Preservation: Towards a Broader Understanding of the Global Hydrological Cycle.

Organizers: French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and French Water Partnership, in collaboration with IPBES, the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, French Office for Biodiversity (OFB) and WWF – Zambia.

Thematic session

> Friday 10 October, from 11 AM to 12:30 PM

CR B: Forum - Room 10

Agroecological Nature-based Solutions in Action: Jointly Addressing the Resilience of Water, Soil, Biodiversity and People.

Hybrid – World Café

Organizers: French Water Partnership, in collaboration with Agroecology Coalition, Biovision Foundation, WWF – UAE, Up2Green, IUCN French Committee, GIZ, IUCN Secretariat, WWF International.

The actions of the French Water Partnership are made possible through the support of its financial partners:

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The French Water Partnership (FWP – Partenariat Français pour l'Eau – PFE) is a key platform of French water stakeholders active internationally.

For nearly 20 years, the FWP has been advocating at an international level to improve the way water-related issues are considered in various actions and policies. The FWP stimulates know-how exchanges between France and other countries by promoting a unique approach: multi-stakeholders, collaborative, and innovative - rooted in the French tradition of water management since the 1960s.

Together with its members, the FWP develops common messages about water resources and promotes them in European and international arenas such as the United Nations Water Conferences, the World Water Forums, the Stockholm World Water Weeks, the COPs on climate change, biodiversity, and desertification, as well as the High-Level Political Forums on the Sustainable Development Goals.

The French Water Partnership is a network of expertise that gathers public, private, and civil society actors, organized into six colleges: the Government and its public bodies; NGOs, associations and foundations; Local authorities and members of parliament; Economic stakeholders; Research and training institutions; French and foreign individuals.

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