Lake Champlain Partners Host Meeting

Community leaders and lake management practitioners from 20 lakes attended an intensive, four-day workshop on participatory watershed management. Participants included representatives of government, research institutions, businesses, universities and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

"LakeNet 2000: A Dialogue on Participatory Watershed Management" was organized by Monitor International and LakeNet’s Lake Champlain partners, who served as the hosts of the meeting. The workshop was the second international gathering of LakeNet.

The intensive four-day workshop was designed to achieve the following goals: 1) facilitate a dialogue among peers in lake management on common themes and successful strategies and approaches for involving citizens and stakeholders in the conservation of lake watersheds; 2) develop individual action plans to address real lake management problems through problem-solving exercises; 3) share and exchange experience with other lake management practitioners from around the world; 4) improve international cooperation among people and organizations that serve as stewards of lakes; 5) learn about the Lake Champlain model for participatory watershed management by participating in demonstrations.

Workshop participants interviewing each other about successful strategies used in their lake regions.

Saint Michael’s College: A Generous Sponsor

The workshop was held on the campus of Saint Michael’s College near Lake Champlain in Colchester, Vermont, with excursions and workshops at the Lake Champlain Basin Science Center in Burlington, Vermont and the nearby area. Saint Michael’s College contributed meeting spaces, housing and meals for participants. Faculty and staff were very active in organizing and hosting the meeting on campus.
Participants Shared Experience from Their Lake Regions

On the opening day of the workshop, participants interviewed each other and talked in small groups about their own experiences with lake management. They identified successful approaches to lake and watershed management along with the tools and techniques that are needed, including good communications, funding, training, sound scientific information, a legal framework, a sense of goodwill and trust, and education.

Participants spent time problem-solving and developing a vision for their lake region. Each person also developed an individual action plan to take back with them.

“While attending this workshop, I sent an email to my Director on Lake Chapala to say that we are not alone!” commented Salvador Peniche, “We now have a family of lakes to work with and share experience.”

Lake Champlain Studied as a Model

Workshop participants learned about how the people of the Lake Champlain region developed a comprehensive watershed action plan which they are now trying to implement with the involvement of Vermont, New York and Quebec.

“It is really important to bring everyone to the table in the beginning. If people get left out, you will need to bring them in too. This helps you keep adding to the ability to implement a watershed plan.”
— Robert Paquin, US Senator Patrick Leahy’s Office

Great Lakes Experience Shared During Study Tour

Immediately following the workshop, environmental managers from Russia, Hungary, Estonia and Macedonia conducted a study tour to the Great Lakes Region.

A busy itinerary included meetings with the Great Lakes Commission, International Joint Commission, Great Lakes National Program Office, US Environmental Protection Agency, State Agencies, Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory, Great Lakes Science Museum and local watershed groups. Participants interacted with people working on issues related to transboundary cooperation, watershed protection and restoration, and research and monitoring programs.

“The Great Lakes Ecosystem is one of the largest laboratories for scientific inquiry. It is also one of the largest laboratories for institutional cooperation.”
— Michael Donahue, Great Lakes Commission
Local Watershed Initiatives Explored During Field Trip

One of the field trips was a hands-on, practical training session on how to work with and organize citizens and stakeholders in valuable citizen watershed activities such as water quality monitoring, watershed surveys, and local watershed protection projects. The group met with members of local watershed associations on the Mad River and Lake Iriquos who are involved in organizing activities at the subwatershed level, including techniques for controlling aquatic nuisance species and erosion, reducing pollution, raising awareness, and more.

Researchers and technical experts agreed that high quality scientific data is needed for sound lake management decisions. They also discussed the importance of bridging the gap between science and policy decisions by looking for better ways to communicate scientific findings and monitoring results. The need for an up-to-date assessment of the state of the world’s lakes is an emerging concern among lake scientists. Developing consistent data management guidelines would be a positive step toward compiling information gathered within lake regions.

Public Education and Awareness Strategies Shared

The Lake Champlain Basin Science Center and Shelburne Farms are two leading educational facilities in the Lake Champlain region. Participants visited both sites and learned about public education and awareness initiatives.

Lake Champlain partners described how a 13 year old boy, using a pocket-sized identification card handed out by the Lake Champlain Basin Program, discovered the first zebra mussels in the lake.

Participants from Lake Biwa shared the story about how housewives led the campaign to ban phosphate-containing detergents.

These and other examples underscored the importance of education and awareness programs.

Research and Monitoring Priorities Established

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About the Network

LakeNet is a global network of people and organizations promoting the conservation and sustainable development of lakes. The network was established in 1997 by Monitor International, a US-based nonprofit organization, which now serves as the network Secretariat.

The goals of the network include: 1) promoting a sustainable and integrated approach to managing lake watersheds; 2) strengthening the institutional capacity of lake organizations; 3) raising awareness about the values of and threats to lakes around the world; and 4) elevating the status of lakes in international, national, regional and local policy discussions and funding decisions.

The first international gathering of the network was at the Lake 99 meeting in Copenhagen last year where representatives from eight lakes participated in a workshop on "Institutional Arrangements for Managing the Great Lakes of the World." At the Lake 99 workshop participants also planned future LakeNet activities and proposed holding workshops twice a year on relevant lake management topics, beginning with Lake Champlain in June 2000 and rotating from lake to lake thereafter.

In addition to workshops, LakeNet activities include: 1) moderating an on-line forum for lake management practitioners; 2) publishing LakeNet News, an electronic newsletter; 3) facilitating partnerships and cooperation among lake regions and lake-related organizations; 4) working to promote lake conservation in international forums; and 5) disseminating information about lake protection.