

Common Understanding of Poyang Lake 2014

Joining hands together, to protect the world's lakes as a source of life

Water is the source of life, and lakes are important natural basins for water on the earth and therefore natural places for life. In the long evolution process of human society, lakes contributed with irreplaceable “natural services” to the well being of human civilization, and their grace should be remembered by people from generation to generation.

Lakes and wetlands belong to the most valuable and most endangered ecosystems on our planet. They continue to face serious problems or to be lost as a consequence of human actions: pollution, eutrophication, over-abstraction of water, destruction of shores because of urbanizations the list of treats to lakes and wetlands is long, despite the fact that our survival, our well-being and economical development relies on their diverse ecosystem services. Especially lakes in densely populated areas are massively affected and the impact of climate change contributes to an even stronger competition between agriculture, drinking water resources, ecosystems, settlements, industrial development and energy production. The IPCC Report 2014 on Climate Change underlines the dramatic consequences for our freshwater resources – especially in the dry subtropical regions: For each degree of global warming, approximately 7 % of the global population will be exposed to a decrease of renewable water resources of at least 20%. The dramatic situation of many lakes requires people to immediately join hands all around the world to solve the numerous conflicts, and seek for a harmonious development between humans and lakes.

Development is an eternal theme. In developed countries as well as in developing countries, we all are faced with the challenge of finding the right way towards a sustainable development based on the protection of the finite natural resources of our planet. Especially in developing countries, the accelerating industrialization and urbanization puts a huge pressure on the environment in general and on lakes and wetlands in particular. It is a common vision of all Living Lakes members and for the

people living in lake regions all over the world to protect their “lake of clear water” in an accelerating development.

How to make this vision a reality?

The participants of the 14th International Living Lakes Conference in Nanchang underline the need for a substantial change of behavior towards profound respect for the ecosystems services provided by lakes and wetlands. In most of the cases, legislation for lake protection is there and it is often good, but needs to be better implemented and enforced. Technology to stop pollution is known and available – but application is lacking. Lake protection needs to be a crucial element of land use planning and of socio-economic development policies; restoration of degraded lakes should be a top priority. The increasing overload of nitrogen and other nutrients is responsible for the eutrophication and acidification of many lakes and national and regional governments are strongly requested to approve Nitrogen Action Plans to reduce the overload. A sound water saving policy needs to be implemented as well as the right price for water considering the costs for the maintenance of the water ecosystems. Low price policy gives the wrong incentives: Industry recycles too little water, agriculture wastes too much water, golf courses are competing with water for households.

Also many of China's 2.000 lakes over 1 km² surface are facing severe problems. Except Poyang Lake, most of the larger lakes in China are seriously polluted or eutrophicated. We welcome the Chinese “Zero Loss of Wetlands Policy” which needs to be implemented urgently.

Poyang Lake is China's largest freshwater lake. The “mother lake” of the Jiangxi Province is still a more or less intact ecosystem and a world famous site for migratory birds. Increasing urbanization and industry in the lake region are the biggest challenges for the sustainable development of Poyang Hu. For many years, the Chinese government acknowledges the importance of the protection of the Poyang Lake and its natural resources, and implemented a series of important measures such as returning farmland to lake or the approval of the “Ecological Economic Zone Planning of Poyang Lake” in order to support the sustainable development of the lake district.

The International Living Lakes Network recognizes the long term efforts of the Jiangxi Province for the protection of Poyang Lake: among others the reforestation in the watershed, implementation of sound lake protection legislation, the creation of 20 nature reserves around the lake and profound monitoring of water quality and other ecosystem functions. Currently, Jiangxi Province is going to take further measures to assure the minimum water level of Poyang Lake during the dry season in order to assure the ecosystem functions to maintain nature and peoples life. All of this is positive.

The joint effort of the regional government, research institutions and NGOs makes Poyang Lake a positive example for the type of partnership which we need to achieve successful lake protection. The International Living Lakes Community contributes with expertise and experience from lakes all over the world and looks forward to communicate Poyang Lake as the positive example for lake protection and circular economy in China and all globally. There is still a long way to go and no easy solutions can be provided, but Poyang Hu is on the right way to become an important piece of the common vision of a harmonious relation between people and lakes.

November 2014, The participants of the 14th World Living Lakes Conference