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World Water Day 2018, 22 March **The answer is in nature – the answer is in forests**

By encouraging people around the globe to explore nature-based solutions to 21st century challenges relating to water, World Water Day is making us take a fresh look at water and the factors leading, in parts of the world, to its increasing scarcity. These challenges include the growing demand for water as agricultural production rises to meet the needs of a swelling world population, water pollution, salinization, and drought.

It is no coincidence that the [International Day of Forests](#) on 21 March and World Water Day fall just one day apart – forests and water are inextricably linked, with the health and extent of the former having a direct bearing on the latter. In fact, forested watersheds – where forests, streams and rivers converge – provide water to 90 percent of the world’s largest cities. Despite this key role in freshwater supplies, some 40 percent of urban watersheds have experienced significant forest loss over the past decade.¹

As more of the world’s forests are lost – to deforestation, degradation or agricultural production – the planet’s water resources are placed increasingly at risk. This concerning development also coincides with a time when 2.1 billion people already live in areas where water resources are insecure.² By slowing or halting deforestation much can be improved, but first must come greater recognition of the priceless role of forests in providing the ecosystem services necessary for life.

But what exactly are these essential forest and water ecosystem services? Forests influence water quantity and regulate surface and groundwater flows. They also maintain high water quality – intact upstream forests can filter water, sometimes making it so pure that additional water treatment is unnecessary.

¹ McDonald, R.I. and D. Shemie, Urban Water Blueprint: Mapping conservation solutions to the global water challenge. 2014, The Nature Conservancy: Washington, D.C.

² FAO. 2013. Forests and Water: International Momentum and Action. FAO, Rome, Italy.

Forests' atmospheric contributions are global in scope: trees can be instrumental in generating clouds on one continent that can have an impact on rainfall on another. Forests can also reduce water-related disaster risks such as landslides, floods, and droughts, while helping to prevent desertification and salinization.

[FAO's Forest and Water Programme](#) is working to position consideration of water-related services at the centre of the strategic and sustainable management of forests within broader landscape restoration and management. To celebrate these important forest and water linkages, FAO, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, and the Stockholm International Water Institute will co-host a side event entitled "The forest-water nexus: redefining the narrative to build a sustainable future" at the [World Water Forum](#) in Brasilia, Brazil, on 21 March. At this event, a joint statement "Forests and Water: managing our connected natural capital," will be released, calling for greater consideration of water in the restoration of multi-functional landscapes and in sustainable forest management.

As the world's water resources come under growing pressures, 22 March 2018 will be the day when we are reminded that the answer to these challenges is in nature – the answer is in forests, and that many of the best solutions aren't built, but planted.



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For more information about [FAO's Forest and Water Programme](#), please contact Elaine Springgay at elaine.springgay@fao.org.