

Skip Schiel supplied the following information.

Skip is a Quaker from Cambridge who spends some time in Palestine/Israel every year. You can read more about his work on his blog.

Skip Schiel

9 Sacramento St

Cambridge MA 02138-1843 USA

skipschiel@gmail.com

<http://teeksaphoto.org>

<http://skipschiel.wordpress.com>

972+054-348-7908 (Israel-Palestine thru September 12, 2009)

Good Water Neighbors Bulletin

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GOOD WATER NEIGHBORS BULLETIN

This is an electronic bulletin on water and environmental issues in our region, produced by Friends of the Earth Middle East with this issue covering July 2009. Friends of the Earth Middle East (FoEME) is a regional environmental organization of Jordanians, Israelis and Palestinians working together to promote sustainable development and peace building through environmental awareness.

REGIONAL UPDATES FROM THE GOOD WATER NEIGHBORS PROJECT

On July 23rd and 24th, the **Good Water Neighbors** project held a **cross border youth campaign** with Israeli "Water Trustees" from Baka Gharbia, and Palestinian "Water Trustees" from Baka Sharkia and Tulkarem. The campaign calls for the protection of their shared water resource, the **Mountain Aquifer**. Together they visited the Palestinian communities' reconstructed wetlands, toured both **Baka Sharkia** and **Tulkarem's** Neighbors Paths, and undertook a clean-up activity in one of the schools. In the evening, they attended a lecture on the uses of GIS mapping as a tool for identifying environmental hazards in their community, and then held a Questions & Answer competition on ecological issues. The event was attended by the mayor of Baka Sharkia as well as officials from the Ministry of Education, showing their support of the project.

NEWS IN BRIEF

PA: 'Not aware' of World Bank contacts on Red-Dead canal deal

Ma'an News Agency, June 30, 2009

Bethlehem – Ma'an – Palestinian Water Authority Chairman Shadad Al-Atili said the Palestinian Authority (PA) was not made aware that Israel was approaching the World Bank for funding a project for a canal from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea. Al-Atili was responding to a report in the mass-selling Israeli newspaper Yedioth Ahronot that said Israel had secured a pledge of World Bank funding for the tripartite Israel-PA-Jordan canal project. The newspaper said Israel's Vice Premier Silvan Shalom had received this assurance during a Washington meeting with World Bank officials. Al-Atili told Ma'an's radio network that Shalom does not have a right to make decisions in this regard without contacting all the concerned parties.

He pointed out that a feasibility study was signed in 2005, and was given to the World Bank to examine it and fund it in case concerned parties decided to carry out the project. Therefore, he said, the World Bank is meant to supervise and fund the project rather than make a decision whether to implement it or not. The canal project proposes the construction of a 112-mile pipeline between the Red Sea and the Dead Sea, in order to pump some 200 million cubic meters of water that would then be desalinated and piped to Israel, the West Bank, and Jordan.

Al-Atili explained that alternatives were being studied in case the canal project was proved infeasible, and so all parties should jointly agree on how to manage water resources in the Jordan River basin. He explained that a meeting was scheduled for 1 July between members of the directive committee to study a Jordanian project which was suggested during the last Davos conference held in the Dead Sea area.

'Drought Tax' takes effect

Ynet.com July 1, 2009

Water conservation efforts rise to a new level: A new tax on water came into effect Tuesday, in hopes of making Israeli household take the need to stop wasting water a little more seriously. The surplus consumption levy, dubbed the "Drought Tax" was the Water Authority's brainchild and suggests a scaled levy on surplus water use.

The Water Authority prices a cubic meter of water for private use at NIS 7.8 (\$1.99). According to statistics, basic water consumption – i.e. the amount used by the average family of four – stands at 15 cubic meters of water a month. The proposed tax prices each additional cubic meter of water between NIS 16 and NIS 20. Nevertheless, both the levy and its scaling – which are a part of the arrangements bill, traditionally submitted to the House along with the budget bill – have yet to be approved by the Knesset.

The majority of the Knesset members object to the new tax, saying it is draconian and miscalculated. Members of the House are currently negotiating with the Water Authority in hopes of increasing the basic consumption level to either 16 or 20 cubic meters. The ministers are also seeking to defer the tax's implementation from July to August or September; a move The Water Authority is against, saying the need to conserve water is most dire during summer. The WA countered the claims of radical taxation, saying that only a third of the water consumers would pay the de facto tax. The WA also said that the purpose of the tax is to make people aware of the amounts of water they use and encourage them to cut unnecessary waste of the precious resource.

No decision made on project funding – World Bank

Jordan Times, July 1, 2009

By Hana Namrouqa

AMMAN - The World Bank on Monday said it has not decided yet to finance the Red-Dead Water Conveyance Project with over \$1 billion. In a letter received by The Jordan Times yesterday, the bank underscored that "any involvement by the World Bank requires consultation with all affected stakeholders".

On Saturday, Agence France-Presse cited Israeli Development Minister Sylvan Shalom as saying that the World Bank approved a pilot plan for the Red-Dead canal project and will provide \$1.25 billion for the initiative.

In a statement sent to The Jordan Times, the World Bank confirmed that a meeting between Shalom and World Bank Group President Robert Zoellick was held on June 25 during which the two parties discussed the ongoing Red Sea-Dead Sea Water Conveyance Study Programme, which is managed by the World Bank, and a second private sector-led initiative, the Jordan Red Sea Development Project, which has no World Bank involvement. But the international agency highlighted that the bank is "working with all parties to explore ideas, including the possibility of phased implementation" of the water conveyance project, which it stressed will be based on the results of the studies, expected to be completed in early 2011.

"They [the studies] will be completed in early 2011 and will help determine further World Bank involvement which will of course be a matter of discussion with the three parties," the statement said, referring to the project's stakeholders: Jordan, the Palestinian Authority and Israel.

The World Bank launched in May last year a \$15 million feasibility study and environmental assessment examining all relevant technical, economic, financial, environmental and social factors of the Red-Dead Water Conveyance Project. "Any involvement by the World Bank requires consultation with all affected stakeholders, careful analysis to ensure that the project would be implemented in

adherence with the World Bank's environmental and social safeguard policies which are designed to protect the environment and affected populations, and approval from the bank's board," the statement added.

Following the news report, Ministry of Water and Irrigation officials earlier this week questioned its reliability, noting that the Kingdom, a key partner in the project, had not been informed of any funding decision and that such approval would depend on the results of the two studies.

The Red-Dead canal project is part of international efforts to save the Dead Sea, which has been shrinking at the rate of one metre per year, largely due to the diversion of water from the Jordan River for agricultural and industrial use. Studies indicate that it has plunged more than 30 metres over the past two decades alone, with experts warning that it could dry up within the next 50 years. The project seeks to pump one billion cubic metres of water annually with the aim of raising the water level in the shrinking lake from 408 metres to 315 metres below sea level.

UNICEF funds water aquifer south of Gaza City

Maan News Agency, July 5th 2009

Gaza - Ma'an - The coastal municipality department in Gaza celebrated the opening of a new water aquifer in the Al-Mughraqa area south of Gaza City on Saturday. The Al-Kawther aquifer will provide residents of Al-Mughraqa with clean water, according to a statement sent from the de facto water department to Ma'an. The new aquifer, which meets UNICEF standards of quality, produces 60 cubic meters of water per hour. It will improve the quality and quantity of water that is pumped into the neighborhood, the department added.

The coastal authority undertook the Al-Kawther aquifer project with funding from UNICEF. The project was aimed at improving the quality of water and life for residents of Al-Mughraqa, who suffer from highly chlorinated water and frequent shortages.

Douglas Higgins, acting representative of UNICEF in the occupied territories, and Ramadan Na'eem of the Gaza water authority, attended the opening ceremony. Members of the municipality and other figures in central Gaza also were also present. Higgins commented on the difficult water situation in Gaza and praised the Palestinians for their efforts in installing the aquifer, despite the financial and political impediments of the ongoing Israeli and Egyptian siege of the coastal strip. The Gaza blockade makes it difficult to provide many of the necessary materials and equipment for such a project, said Maher An-Najjar of the water department, adding that it has spent US 60-70 million on projects throughout the Gaza Strip because of the siege.

Report: Unusually low rainfall last winter left Kinneret, aquifers thirsty

Ha'aretz, July 30, 2009

By Zafir Rinat

Last winter Lake Kinneret only received about 56 percent of the water it receives in an average rainy season, the Water Authority said in a report released this week.

Precipitation was slightly greater than the winter before, but cumulatively speaking it is the fifth year in a row of less-than-average rainfall.

The Kinneret has dropped more than two meters in the past two years. In addition, the water has become increasingly more saline for the fifth year running, because less low-saline water (rainwater) is coming into the lake. Since the water is used for irrigation, this endangers crops sensitive to high salt concentrations.

The Water Authority said the southern part of the lake is below the dam keeping the water from flowing south into the Jordan River and on to the Dead Sea. Even if the dam were opened, no water would flow southward. The level of the Dead Sea has been dropping at the rate of about 90 centimeters a year.

The heavy rains in February increased last winter's overall precipitation, with some areas experiencing rainfall amounts that are seen only once every fifty years. However, in January Jerusalem had its lowest rainfall since 1895, and in the Kinneret region the rainfall was the lowest since the 1920s.

The Water Authority has minimized the amount of water being pumped from the Kinneret, which means it is forced to make up the difference by pumping from the coastal and mountain aquifers. The mountain aquifer, where the water is considered to be of high quality, dropped sharply toward the red line, below which this source faces the risk of leakage of saline water. In the central aquifer (a well in the Petah Tikva area) the water level is only 10 centimeters above the red line, Water Authority measurements show. North of that point, at the present rate of pumping, the water level in the mountain aquifer will dip below the red line in a few months.

Experts, officials to discuss ways to support national water strategy

Jordan Times, July 26, 2009

By Hana Namrouqa

AMMAN - Experts and officials from the private and public sectors will meet today to find ways to better support the Kingdom's water strategy. The 2009-2022 Jordan Water Strategy, which was drafted in August last year and announced in May, includes a series of water megaprojects to meet the

Kingdom's needs and aims at maximising the benefits of surface water and bringing an end to arbitrary pumping from underground wells. The JD5.86 billion water strategy entails an investment programme that calls for the implementation of several projects seeking to provide sufficient and safe drinking water.

At today's workshop, participants are expected to formulate programmes and governmental procedures that regulate the water sector and help implement the water strategy, Ministry of Water and Irrigation Secretary General Maysoun Zu'bi said on Saturday.

"There are several issues that need to be addressed in order for us to best carry out the strategy, such as building codes, awareness programmes and effective water demand management among other topics," Zu'bi told The Jordan Times yesterday.

Participants at the two-day workshop, which will be held at the Dead Sea, will also examine standards for grey water - non-industrial wastewater generated from domestic processes. Grey water constitutes 60 per cent of domestic wastewater in Jordan. Programmes and recommendations suggested during the workshop will be sent to the Royal Water Committee for approval and later distributed to various institutions in the water sector, according to Zu'bi.

The 2009-2022 Jordan Water Strategy looks at all aspects of the water cycle from rainfall to collection, treatment and discharge. It seeks to reduce demand by raising public awareness on the water situation in the Kingdom. Under the strategy, the ministry will introduce a new water law, water regulatory body and a water council. "The ministry is currently studying the terms of reference of the new water law and the restructuring of the water sector," Zu'bi noted.

As unsustainable extraction of groundwater and the depletion of groundwater aquifers are major problems facing the water sector in Jordan, the strategy calls for enforcing stringent regulations to conserve and protect groundwater sources. The strategy also focuses on institutional reform, efficient use of water resources, implementation of the Disi project and the Red-Dead Water Conveyance Project, as well as a cap on irrigation water demand.

PA set to call in UNSC over Israeli plans to confiscate land, build Dead Sea canal

Maan News Agency, July 9th, 2009

Ramallah - Ma'an - Palestinian ministers will approach the US and the World Bank demanding a halt to construction plans for a canal linking the Dead to the Red sea including the confiscation of more than a hundred thousand dunams of Palestinian land.

The Ministers say two recent Israeli moves, first to announce a "go ahead" from the World Bank for the construction of a multi-billion dollar project to link the Dead Sea and the Red Sea, and second to begin the process of registering 139,000 dunams of Palestinian land between the Israeli settlement of Ma'ale Adumim and the Dead sea as "abandoned," with the intent to annex the land to the settlement, constitute a grand move to push the canal project forward.

Apropos to the recent Israeli moves, the Council of Ministers issued a statement demanding the US Administration and the International Quartet Committee adopt a firm position regarding the Israeli government actions. "The illegal annexation of Palestinian land between Ma'ale Adumim and the Dead Sea tightens Israeli control over the area," the statement said. The canal plans may cause severe damage to the water systems in the Dead Sea basin, environmentalists warned two years ago when a World Bank feasibility study took off.

Palestinians also expressed grave concern that the project would effectively cut Palestinian residential areas off yet another water source and leave the government out of crucial decision making over the use of natural resources. "If Israel does not stop this scheme, the PNA will approach the World Bank and demand the halt of the project and will resort to the UN Security Council and the International Court of Justice to prevent Israel as an occupation state from confiscating the lands and transforming them into municipality and state property in accordance with the international law," the statement said

Israel launches program to save coastal aquifer

Ha'aretz, July 31, 2009

By Zafirir Rinat

Israel is launching a project aimed at saving its water, wracked by concerns that one of the country's vital sources of underground water might become salty. The National Water Authority has authorized the national water company, Mekorot, to begin a NIS 500 million rescue program to counter salination in the coastal aquifer.

The plan, supervised by Yossi Gutman and Ido Negev, will include a series of 35 drillings from the north of Ashdod to Sderot. The drilling will allow Mekorot to pump out up to 40 million cubic meters of water carrying salts and other minerals. The water will be desalinated in special plants and used as drinking water. The salt residue from the process will be pumped out to sea.

The coastal aquifer, which stretches from Caesarea to the Gaza Strip, is one of Israel's most important sources of groundwater. But it is seriously threatened by chemical and microbial pollutants, salination, nitrates, heavy metals, fuels and toxic organic compounds.

According to the most recent report by the hydrological service, about 15 percent of the total amount of water pumped from the coastal aquifer does not comply with drinking water standards for chloride and nitrate concentrations.

According to the Environmental Protection Ministry, nitrate concentrations in the coastal aquifer have increased considerably due to intensive use of fertilizers in agriculture and the use of treated effluents for irrigation. Since 1950, average nitrate concentrations have risen from 30 mg/liter to 63 mg/liter.

Overpumping - pumping exceeding the replenishment rate - subsequently reduced water levels by six to 10 meters and changed the direction of water flow. This disturbed the delicate balance between the entrance and exit of salts and pollutants, increasing chloride concentrations. "The goal is not only to pump saline water, but to stabilize water levels and prevent pollution," said Dr. Negev.

Regional organization to boost water management in Arab World

Jordan Times, July 31, 2009

By Hana Namrouqa

The water situation in Jordan and the Arab world is expected to worsen as rapid population growth and economic development are placing a strain on water resources, experts warned on Thursday.

During the official launch of the headquarters of the Arab Countries Water Utilities Association (ACWUA) in Amman yesterday, water experts highlighted the importance of rationing water consumption and introducing policies and technology to ensure better management of the region's limited water resources. Underscoring the importance of addressing water scarcity and providing quality water and sanitation services, the Minister of Water and Irrigation, Raed Abu Saud, urged countries to exchange information and expertise through ACWUA, a regional association featuring the participation of water officials from the public and private sectors in Arab and donor countries.

The minister noted that the inauguration of ACWUA's headquarters coincides with the recent launch of the Disi Water Conveyance Project, which is designed to supply Amman with 100 million cubic metres of water from the southern Disi aquifers. "The Disi project will have a major role in controlling water demand until the Red-Dead Water Conveyance Project is implemented, which is when the Kingdom's water security will be achieved," Abu Saud said during the ceremony, which saw the participation of 11 Arab countries and donor agencies.

Meanwhile, International Water Association (IWA) Executive Director Paul Reiter, who took part in yesterday's launch, underscored the role of the ACWUA in addressing water problems in the region.

What the ACWUA can do for Jordan and the region is help find pathways to more efficient uses of water, which take the form of efficiency and the ability to use water over and over again," Reiter told The Jordan Times yesterday, underscoring that desalinated sea water is an efficient water resource that Jordan and the Arab countries should explore.

The IWA executive director said Jordan was selected to host ACWUA's headquarters because "it is an important country in the region that is neutral and can work with all of its neighbors".

At yesterday's event, ACWUA Secretary General Khaldoun Khashman reviewed the association's 2009-2010 action plan, which included signing a memorandum of cooperation with the IWA for capacity building. Khashman noted that the society has also signed a memorandum of cooperation with USAID-ABRI, the German Agency for Technical Cooperation and the IWA to draw up a 2010-2015 business plan.

The ACWUA aims to develop technical standards, provide consultation to water megaprojects boost water sector cooperation and launch awareness programmes on the regional level, according to the association.

REMARKS

This bulletin is part of Friends of the Earth Middle East's regional project: Good Water Neighbors. The bulletin aims to bring up to date information from the region on pertinent water issues facing communities, focusing on water provision, allocation and good management practices.

All issues of Good Water Neighbors bulletins are also available online at: www.foeme.org.

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