



March 23, 2023 (World Water Day +1),

Declaration at UN 2023 Water Conference - in Support of Protections for Natural Water Systems

[*NOTE: We submit this abbreviated version of our Declaration according to UN Submission Guidelines. We respectfully request that the original version, as submitted previously with over 100 signers, be retained as our submission. If that is not possible please accept this version.

[Original and complete version \(English\)](#) ([Spanish version](#))



Dear UN-Water Secretariat, Excellencies, Members, Partners, and attendees of the UN 2023 Water Conference,

We, the undersigned, urge UN staff, UN-Water members, partners and participants, national and local governments, and civil society organizations to declare support for and intentional focus for protecting natural water systems in addition to the laudable goal of bringing much needed infrastructure to provide clean water and sanitation to people.

We gather here for this historic opportunity to protect water around the world and to uphold the basic human right to clean and abundant water for all of humankind. We applaud everyone here for their work to protect Earth's most precious resource. We recognize that without safe, abundant, clean, and accessible water that is identified in United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 6, the other United Nations Sustainable Development Goals will not be achievable. Water is Life. And all life depends on clean water.

We support efforts discussed here at the UN Water Conference and around the world to improve sanitation and water access, and other efforts to ensure the [human right to clean water](#) is upheld and strengthened for everyone. We ask the UN to also consider declaring that water for nature is a human right as well, particularly for Indigenous, river-dependent, coastal, and island communities. For many communities and peoples, pollution, habitat loss, dams, and water diversions amount to loss of traditional food sources such as fish and freshwater plants.

CLEAN WATER  STRONG COMMUNITIES

When we consider all the ways that people, plants, and animals rely on abundant, clean, and accessible water, we understand that intact, healthy, natural water systems readily provide these services for us in many ways. And throughout the millennia of human history, humans and the ecosystems in which they live have developed adaptations, cultural pillars, spiritual connections, sustenance, and a symbiotic relationship with (and reliance on) functioning and healthy natural water systems, including: snow pack, glaciers, streams, rivers, wetlands, transitional waters, groundwater, lakes, estuaries, coasts, marine waters, and open oceans.

These natural water systems provide the basis for thriving ecosystems that support biodiversity, fisheries, human drinking water needs, traditional harvest practices of Indigenous peoples and rural communities, cultural and spiritual traditions and values, wildlife habitat, and most pressing: climate control. A functioning and healthy natural water system provides services for humans, plants, animals, and the climate, every day. When these systems are impacted or destroyed due to pollution, habitat damage, water withdrawals, watercourse alterations, fossil fuel extraction, mining waste, development, and impacts of the climate crisis, biodiversity and water-dependent communities suffer, as does the ability of the Earth to mitigate and adapt to the climate crisis.

Examples of natural water systems that provide immense benefits but that are now under threat include:

1. Free-flowing rivers with enough flow, and natural lakes with enough water, for maintaining healthy natural water cycles, ecosystems, and fish migration.
2. Spring-fed waters, interconnected aquifers, and high mountain ecosystems that store and release clean fresh water.
3. Wetlands and estuaries that serve as nurseries and water purification systems for aquatic and terrestrial life.
4. Coral reef ecosystems that support thriving diverse food webs and support island people and quite literally the land they live on.
5. Mangroves that act as natural defense systems, protecting coastal communities from storm surges, also serving as a source of food for thousands of species and vital forests for carbon capture and sequestration.
6. Coastlines, bays and estuaries that provide Indigenous and sustainable artisanal fishing, thereby protecting cultural values, livelihoods and providing sustenance for coastal communities while nurturing the open ocean.

These natural water systems have historically provided freely available vital services, but are under severe human-influenced threat.

We encourage the parties of UN-Water to move forward with discussions, agreements, investments and commitments to make these and other important water protections a reality.

Respectfully Submitted,

Chris Wilke
Global Advocacy Manager