

Ethics for a Sustainable Water Future

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The ways in which water is used reflect intangible values and ethics



What is “good” use of water?



Hotel fountain in Las Vegas?



Processing copper ore?



Irrigating alfalfa for animal feed?

Contrasting Cosmovisions of Water

Modern: Water as a Resource



Grand Coulee Dam, USA

Traditional: Water as a Relative



Anuradapura, Sri Lanka

Water Ethics: Why and How?

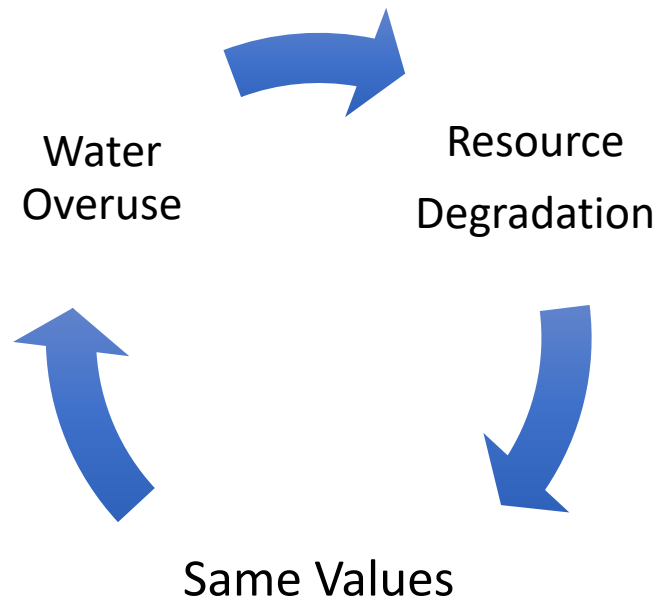
WHY?

- Values motivate behavior
- Our water behavior needs to change (and fast!)
- We need to change our values first

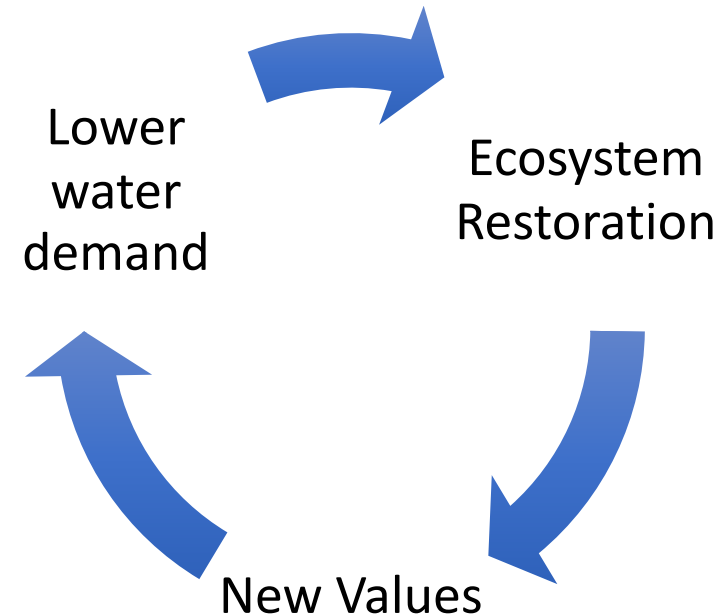
HOW?

- Clarify our values about water
 - Are these the values we want to express?
 - Identify value conflicts and synergies
 - “Ethical reflection”
- Promote water policies that are consistent with values
- Take personal actions that are consistent with our ethics

Why New Values Are Needed



“Vicious Cycle”
of Extraction



“Virtuous Cycle”
of Restoration

How values/ethics can guide our water response to climate change

- What are our water values?
 - Environmental
 - Economic
 - Social
 - Cultural
 - Governance
- What do our ethics tell us?
 - Raise awareness
 - Acknowledge the crisis
 - Develop new messages and strategies
 - Act with urgency!



Types of Water-Use and Water Values

Types of Values

Types of Water Use	Environ.	Social	Cultural	Governance	Economic
Ecosystems	X	X	X	X	X
Agriculture	X	X	X	X	X
Urban/domestic	X	X	X	X	X
Industrial	X	X	X	X	X
Energy	X	X	X	X	X
Cultural/Spiritual	X	X	X	X	X

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Five Dimensions of Water Values/Ethics

1. **Environmental** values about the health of water ecosystems.
2. **Economic** values about efficiency and avoiding waste of real or virtual water.
3. **Social** values about human health and well-being, including right to water and sanitation;
4. **Cultural** values about identity, meaning, and relationship to water ecosystems;
5. **Governance** values about participation, transparency, and accountability.

Two Categories of Water

(1) Water in Nature

- Rivers
- Lakes
- Wetlands
- Aquifers
- Springs

(2) Water diverted for human use

- Agriculture
- Industry
- Domestic use (cooking, washing, drinking, sanitation)

Towards a New Water Ethic

What guidance can we find for crafting a new water ethic?

- (1) Re-categorize water from "resource" to "Human Right"
 - Water decisions become moral and ethical decisions
 - We need to develop a field of Water Ethics to support good decisions
- (2) Normative frameworks for water management
 - Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and the "One Water" concept
 - Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
 - Etc.
- (3) Water Ethics Charter

Water is a matter of life or death for people and all living beings...

- We cannot make wise decisions about water unless we consider the values and ethics involved
 - Legal frameworks and economic impact studies are important but incomplete
 - Life or death issues deserve to be based on moral and ethical principles.
- Step #1 is to ask ethical questions
- Step #2 is to look for morally-based guidance

Normative Frameworks for Water

Provide a Basis for a New Water Ethics

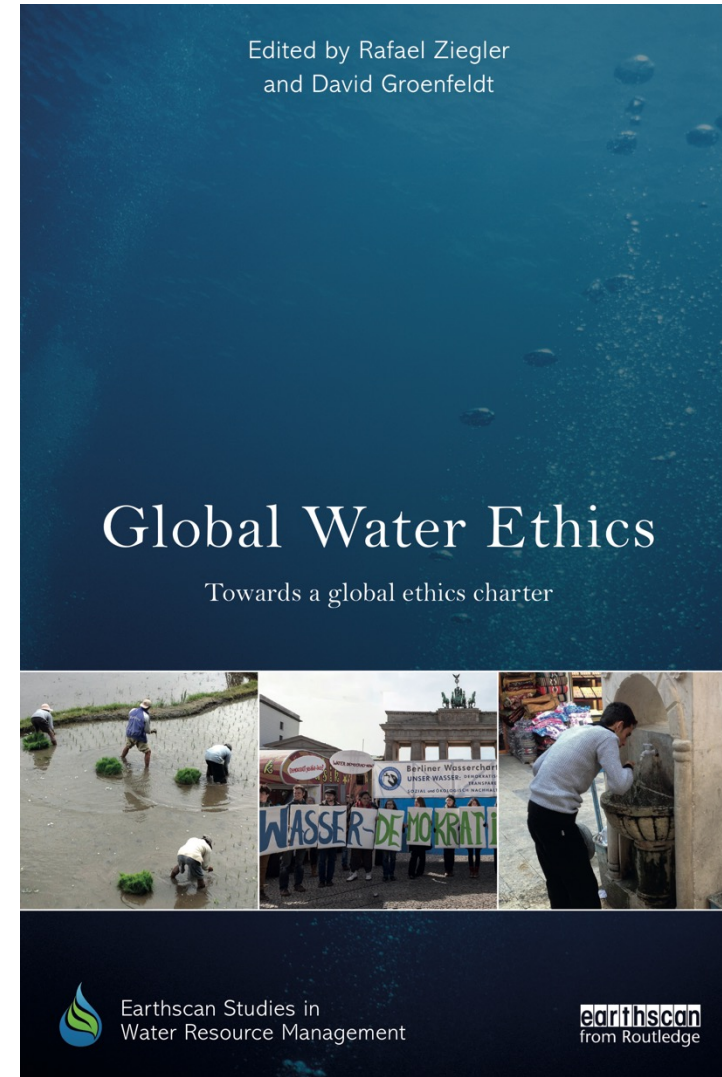
- IWRM and Nexus approaches (“Integration”)
- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- Environmental Flow and Biodiversity (UN CBD)
- Water Integrity (Transparency Int’l)
- Human Right to Water (UN)
- Water Stewardship (Industry)
- 17 Principles for Water-Wise Cities (IWA)
- Rights of Rivers Movement (Water Protectors)
- Commons Movement (IASC)
- Water Justice (EWN/WCC)
- Water Governance Principles (OECD)
- Cultural Diversity/Ontologies (UN-DRIP)
- Etc...

SDG 6 – “The Water Goal”

- 6.1 equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all
- 6.2 sanitation and hygiene for all
- 6.3 improve water quality by reducing pollution and halving the proportion of untreated wastewater
- 6.4 increase water-use efficiency (domestic, agricultural, industrial) and ensure sustainable withdrawals
- 6.5 implement integrated water resources management at all levels
- 6.6 protect and restore water-related ecosystems

Global Water Ethics Charter

- Proposed by 2012 World Water Forum
- Initial Partners
 - UNESCO
 - French Water Academy
 - Botin Foundation
 - Water-Culture Institute
- Other Partners
 - Sustainable Water Futures
 - World Council of Churches
 - Alliance for Water Stewardship

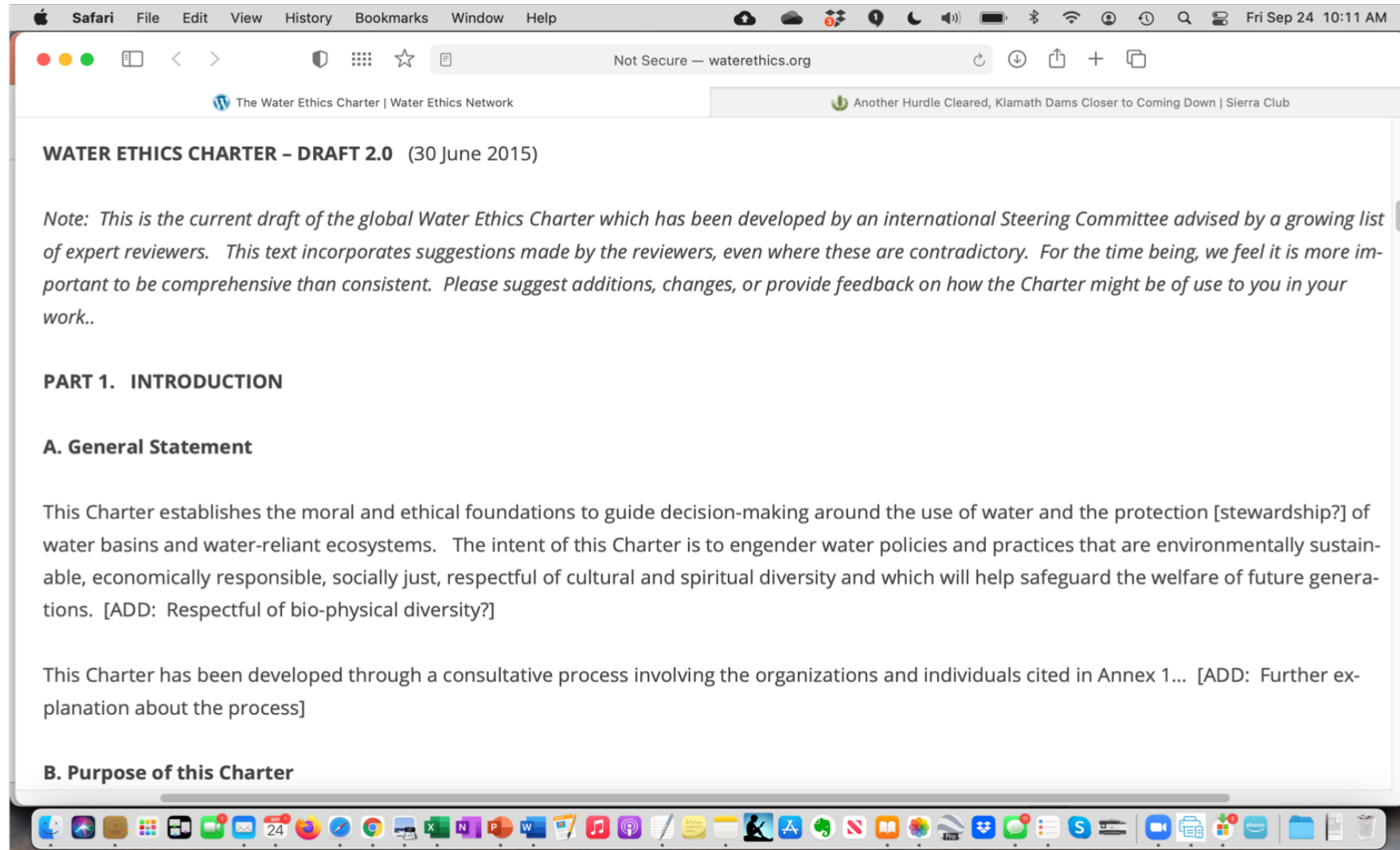


Global Water Ethics Charter (cont.)

- Builds on 1998-2004 UNESCO initiative
- Seeks consensus across geographic and cultural lines
- Explicitly prescriptive (what *should* be)
- Intended as reference for water decisions / policies
- Serves as template for local water ethics charters
- Presented in 2015 World Water Forum (in S. Korea)
- Posted on Water Ethics Network (**waterethics.org**)

A Global Water Ethics Charter

<http://waterethics.org/the-water-ethics-charter/>



A new water ethic can emerge through clarifying our water values



- Restore river health
- Recognize water as a commons
- Equitable access to water (social justice)
- Free, prior and informed consent
- Reflect interests of all stakeholders

Values guide our response to both the water crisis and the climate crisis

- Reflect on our water values
 - Environmental
 - Economic
 - Social
 - Cultural
 - Governance
- What are our ethics telling us?
 - Raise awareness
 - Acknowledge the crisis
 - Develop new messages and strategies
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No time to adapt: We need to *adopt* a new ecocentric paradigm for water

- Recognize rights of rivers
- Rights of future generations to healthy water ecosystems;
- Respect rights of Indigenous Peoples to protect the rivers they depend on;
- Environmental justice and participatory governance



Reconciliation with Nature...



Begins with recognizing water as an ethical domain

How to Change the Paradigm?

- Use the framework of Water Ethics to map water values and ethics into a “Water Charter”
- Develop messages based on these value principles;
- Find creative ways to communicate the message and engage with diverse stakeholders.
- Be willing to risk your reputation to save water ecosystems from the impacts of unchecked water extraction and climate change.
- Prioritize Nature’s health... Be eco-centric today in order to be “people-centric” tomorrow.



Earthscan Water
Text Series

David Groenfeldt

Water Ethics

A Values Approach to
Solving the Water Crisis

SECOND EDITION

earthscan
by Routledge

Conclusions:

How to Promote Ethical Use of Water?



- Get involved...
 - Existing organizations
 - Start new initiatives
- Develop Local Water Charters
 - Reclaim water as a common good for everyone
 - Integrate the water sub-sectors
 - Urban water supply
 - River restoration
 - Industrial / corporate use
 - Agricultural use and impacts

Conclusions (cont.)

- Apply ethics to decision-making about
 - Water research priorities
 - How much priority to give to outreach/awareness-raising
- Establish an “enabling environment” for water ethics;
 - Develop “water ethics” as a recognized field of study (cf. medical ethics and public health ethics)
 - Apply “ethical imagination” to inspire water innovations
 - Make water more visible through art and urban waterscapes

A photograph of a lush green valley with terraced rice fields. Several people are working in the water-filled terraces, planting rice seedlings. In the background, there are rolling hills and mountains under a cloudy sky. A small hut with a thatched roof is visible on one of the terraces.

Thank You!

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waterethics.org