

Innovative Watershed Project Launches New Goal: Local Residents to Protect a Quarter of Forests Important for Water in Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia

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A new initiative led by more than 125 municipal and regional governments across the Andes to protect upstream water sources by conserving forests was announced at the Global Landscapes Forum today. The goal of *Watershed* is to protect a quarter of the Colombian, Peruvian, Ecuadorian and Bolivian forests that are important for supplying water by 2025. The program will do so by having local residents support upstream conservation efforts, to ensure supplies of water for drinking, irrigation of crops and production of hydropower.

Watershed is an integrated adaptation, mitigation and development model adopted by cities and towns across the Andes. It protects old growth forests (*climate change mitigation*) and their water sources (*adaptation*); increases knowledge about the impact of climate change (*adaptation*); and provides economic alternatives to rain-fed agriculture through fruit tree seedlings, beehives and irrigation systems (*adaptation, development and food security*).

The program uses three tactics:

- Municipal Water Funds: local institutions finance adaptation and mitigation
- Reciprocal Watershed Agreements (RWA): reciprocity-based incentives for private and community-led conservation
- Protected Area Creation: locally-managed protection of upstream water factories

Watershed Protection through a Newly Established Municipal Water Fund

The fundamental building block of local sustainable watershed management is the creation of a locally designed and managed institutional structure.

Since 2009, Ecuador's FORAGUA Regional Water Fund has joined 11 Municipalities (with six more in process) in a trust fund mechanism to support watershed protection across southern Ecuador. Once local institutions have been strengthened, *Watershed* depends on maintaining long term funding from water users.

- In southern Ecuador, water fees generate ~\$400,000 each year, paying to protect 74,000 hectares that supply water to more than 430,000 people.
- In Bolivia, quarter of a million water-users have increased their water bills to pay for upstream conservation. In Peru, the San Lorenzo Irrigators Association in Quiroz are paying \$100,000 per year for upstream conservation, including the creation of new protected areas, in return for development projects.

Creation of New Protected Areas to Protect Economically Important Water Sources

Once local funding sources have been secured, *Watershed* comprises two complementary mechanisms, the first of which is the creation of new water sanctuaries above cities and towns that will protect in perpetuity the critical water sources upon which residents depend.

- In Medellin, Colombia, Corantioquia (Regional Environmental Corporation of Central Antioquia) is working with Naturaleza y Cultura Internacional to create a series of new Protected Areas. These new Water Sanctuaries will contribute to the water supply of the city of Medellin and other communities.

- The Las Alegrías reserve will strengthen a 160,000 ha conservation corridor for the endangered Andean spectacled bear, while the Alto Anorí and Bajo Cauca Nechí sanctuaries will contribute to bird conservation in lowland and sub-Andean forests, while other areas will protect the Medio Magdalena wetlands and the Rio Medellín.
- In Bolivia, indigenous Guarani in Huacareta and Machareti municipalities have declared the legal protection of more than 200,000 ha of water sanctuaries above their communities.

New Reciprocal Watershed Agreements protect 200,000 ha of Water Factories

The second *Watershared* mechanism comprises Reciprocal Watershed Agreements (RWA).

- In Bolivia, 226,435 water-users have signed agreements with 3,200 upstream landowners to conserve 178,448 ha of water-producing forests. These reciprocity-based conservation agreements are in return for alternative development projects such drip irrigation, fruit and honey production and improved cattle management.
- In a RWA in Bolivia's El Torno Municipality, Carlos and Teodisia Calani are conserving 38 ha of their forest in the buffer zone of the Amboro National Park. In return, downstream water users have helped them build a two-room brick house. After years of living in a shack with adobe walls and a motacú palm roof, their new home is nearly ready. "We are grateful for this new house that we have earned for being a part of watershared" says Teodisia.
- In Colombia, the Regional Corporación Valle de Cauca (CVC) is working with Rare in seven watersheds with 700 upstream landowners and 20,000 downstream water users toward establishing a reciprocal relationship where all contribute to conservation. The project is already protecting more than 1,000 ha. CVC, Rare and additional partners have established agreements to manage funds through a regional fund that will reduce transaction costs and improve on-the-ground interventions toward watershed protection.

New Adaptation, Mitigation, Conservation and Development at Scale

With the two mechanisms of protected areas and reciprocal watershed agreements—sometimes accelerated through social marketing campaigns—*Watershared* works at multiple levels. Building on grassroots municipal initiatives state governments in Loja, Valle de Cauca, Piura and elsewhere are bridging the top-down/bottom-up divide.

Bolivia's Department of Tarija, covers an area about the size of Switzerland. The Governor, Adrian Oliva, is working to protect Tarija city's water supply to include a series of Protected Areas linking conservation targets with development goals, though new water sanctuaries and reciprocal watershed agreements.

Enormous Possibilities for Watershared Tool Kit

The potential value of combining the use of *Municipal Water Funds*, *Reciprocal Watershed Agreements* and *Protected Areas* are enormous, and yet to be tapped.

FORAGUA is about to spread from southern Ecuador across the entire country, and >10% of Bolivian municipalities are in the process of initiating Reciprocal Watershed Agreements. RWA are also being initiated in 29 municipalities in Peru and Ecuador and across Colombia's Valle de Cauca.

Watershared Directly Supports Sustainable Development Goals

- Goal 6 target: "protect water-related ecosystems including mountains, forests (and rivers); and "strengthen participation of local communities in water management"

- Goal 13 target: “strengthen ... adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards...”
- Goal 15 target: “...ensure the conservation and ... sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests (and) mountains”, and “promote ... sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase ... reforestation”.

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About Watershared

Watershared is funded by the public (local governments and donors including the European Union); private sector investors such as Swiss Re; and foundations such as the Overbrook and Tinker Foundations. Local institutions such as CVC and municipal governments implement each program, with technical support from Natura Bolivia, Nature and Culture International (NCI) and RARE. The research upon which *Watershared* is based was undertaken by Harvard University and the National University of Colombia, supported by the Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation Program, DFID and the UK's Natural Environment Research Council, Innovations for Poverty Action and the Jameel Poverty Action Lab.

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