

## **Second Annual Friends of the Lower Mekong Meeting**

Remarks from Carter Roberts, President and CEO at World Wildlife Fund:

Madame Secretary, on behalf of WWF's offices in every Mekong River country, I want to thank you for including us in this important event.

As much as any other place on Earth, the Mekong captures the imperative of finding ways to meet the needs of people without destroying the planet that sustains us all.

Traditionally, it has always been seen as a choice between the economy or the environment. Here we see clearly the need and the opportunity to think of the economy and the environment as a way to meet our short term needs without unwittingly destroying the basis for people's livelihoods throughout the region. New forms of energy through diversionary production, new forms of infrastructure and new forms of agriculture that don't repeat the mistakes we made in the Mississippi.

At Rio+20, 59 nations committed to accounting for their natural capital in conducting their national plans. Those countries include all five Mekong Basin countries, largely because of the Mekong River. As Secretary Clinton pointed out, this River system is indeed a miracle. A rough estimate of every nation's natural capital—the ability of nature to feed people, provide fresh water and fuel their crops and energy needs—has been turned into a color coded map of the world, and when you turn your eyes to Asia, amid an expanse of muted colors, the Mekong River Basin shines bright. Simply put: you've got what everyone else wants.

And here you still have the whole complex Mekong system whose fish feed tens of millions of people, and whose flow supports the extraordinary rice production in the Delta, and if managed responsibly could provide a 21st century version of sustainable energy. It is a truism that the only way to manage such riches is to think as a whole – whether it is the whole Amazon, or the entire Arctic, or the Congo or the Mekong, when you plan for such systems piecemeal, or country by country, you begin to lose the parts and the systems begins to fail.

The connections here are immense and require the best available science. We're just completing a study that looks at the root causes of why, after five thousand years of the Delta expanding in size, we now see it retreating. The key is to understand the implications of basin management and to make smart choices based on a thorough understanding of the region.

We applaud the Lower Mekong Initiative and underscore the essential importance of the Mekong River Commission as a vehicle to think of the whole basin, to consider science showing the connections and to make smart choices in meeting your needs for energy security and food security without destroying the natural capital that makes your region the envy of all. And WWF stands ready to help.