Basin Report Cards

TRANSFORMING HOW FRESH WATER IS MANAGED

We depend on thriving, healthy freshwater basins for everything from food and health to energy and economic growth. Rapid environmental changes are affecting the quality and quantity of fresh water available for human consumption, agriculture and electricity generation. To ensure the ongoing functionality of freshwater systems, we must act now to implement the most effective methods for managing our precious water resources.

In most of the world, the impacts of our freshwater consumption and the role of climate change in ecosystem health are rarely measured and little understood by the public. In places where information does exist, it often sits in disparate locations and cannot be easily communicated to media, policy makers, corporations and the general public.

This knowledge gap allows decisions about water management to be made behind closed doors, often at the expense of the basin's health. However, where information about lake or river basin health is synthesized and delivered via a public platform, people are empowered and make better water management decisions. Basin health assessments and report cards create a shared vision of ecosystem health and spur action towards improvement.

Some places, such as the Chesapeake Bay, have ongoing report cards that have become go-to resources for the media, advocates, businesses and government officials seeking to understand watershed conditions. Armed with clear information, decision makers can help change behavior and policy to measurably improve basin health.

Unfortunately, current report cards have been carried out in just a small number of basins. Historically, they have been both costly to develop and not feasible in basins where data is limited. WWF seeks to change this situation by developing a process for creating basin report cards that can be replicated around the world.

A TRANSFORMATIVE INITIATIVE

To be successful, our "next gen" basin report cards need to be

- scientifically credible
- fast and inexpensive to create
- flexible enough to fit different geographic scales
- useful in situations with little or no data
- feasible even in countries with few resources and minimal technical capacity
- easily updated using improved data or new baselines that have shifted due to climate change
- driven by local stakeholders who believe the process to be salient, legitimate and credible
- packaged in a way that makes complex information actionable by both technical and nontechnical audiences
- replicable by local institutions in the basin to ensure ongoing monitoring
- easily shared with other basins interested in creating report cards

Amazon river dolphin

CREATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Comprehensive, credible and compelling basin report cards will help government officials, business leaders and communities make informed decisions on energy, food, water and other resources that avoid compromising basin health and essential ecosystem services. Through developing these report cards in a variety of freshwater basins around the world, we can move closer to our goal of securing water for people and nature.

WWF will gather, package and share freshwater basin health information in a manner that is replicable, applicable in data-poor areas and more efficient than existing models. We will ground our approach in a transparent and participatory process that engages businesses, civil society and governments from the onset. To ensure the report cards are globally credible and accepted, we will also engage world-renowned experts throughout the process.

Using this approach, we can develop report cards that not only reveal the status and trends of basin health, but also catalyze improvements in policy, management and behavior.

The development of a report card will have seven major steps:

1. Engage Stakeholders

Collaborate with local stakeholders to define the value of the basin. Create a framework that establishes goals and major aspects of each goal that should be evaluated.

2. Choose Indicators

Select indicators that correspond to the basin's value, convey meaningful information, and can be reliably measured.

3. Build Consensus

Create a shared vision of the ideal state of the basin and how data can be gathered, reported and measured.

4. Collect Data

Tap existing resources and gather new data as needed.

5. Calculate Scores

Analyze results and create a report card.

6. Communicate Results

Inspire positive change using visual elements such as photos, maps and conceptual diagrams that can be easily understood by the media, the general public, government entities and the private sector.

7. Replicate Locally and Globally

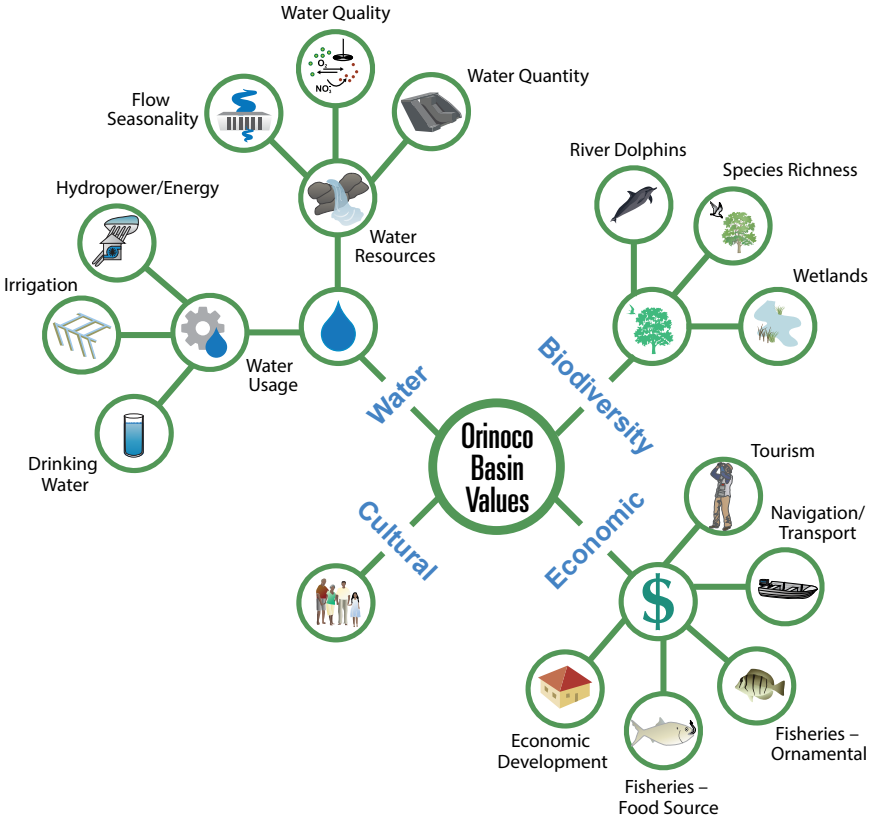
Build the capacity of local stakeholders to update report card information on an ongoing basis. Optimize the report card data collection process for global scalability by identifying ways to streamline costs, increase efficiency, bridge data gaps and enhance adaptability.

PILOTING BASIN REPORT CARDS

In partnership with the University of Maryland's Integration and Application Network and our colleagues at WWF-Colombia, we will launch a basin

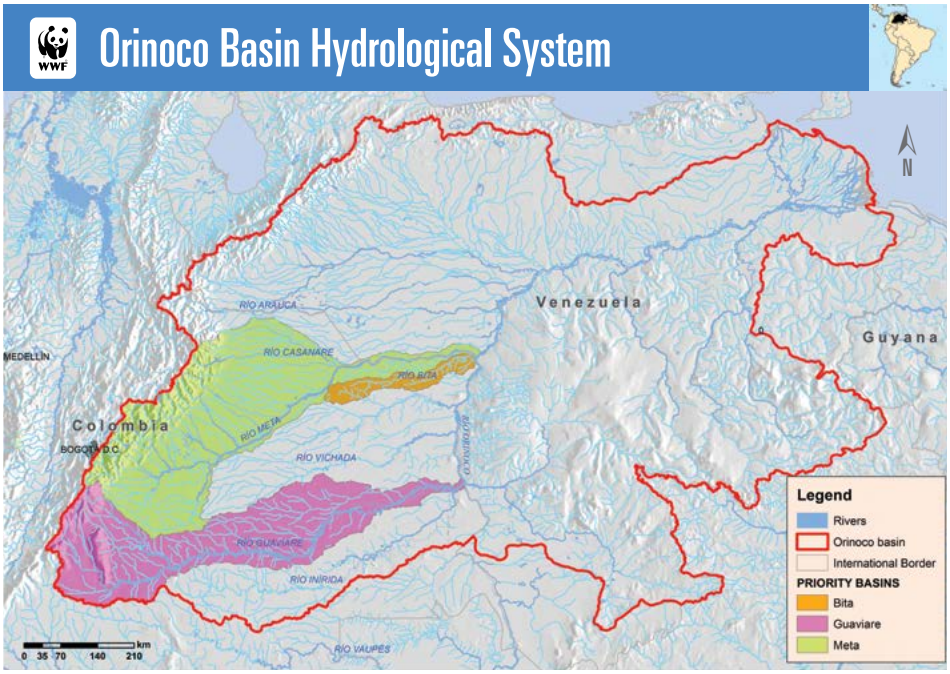
report card prototype in the Colombian headwaters of the Orinoco River Basin.

The pilot process will be carefully documented, analyzed and improved with the goal of identifying ways to streamline for scalability. Concurrent with the pilot in the Orinoco basin, we will be laying the groundwork for report card development in at least two additional basins. These projects will provide a broader perspective by which to understand the barriers to replication and how to overcome them.



Pilot Objectives

- Launch a prototype of a scalable process for gauging basin health
- Catalyze action through developing basin report cards for three significant tributaries of the Orinoco River within Colombia: the Meta, Bita and Guaviare rivers
- Engage and connect stakeholders in the region, increasing public awareness of the value of and threats to the Orinoco basin
- Provide managers and decision makers with scientifically robust, synthesized information
- Facilitate assessment of conservation activities, identify areas of concern and develop a baseline for measuring change
- Produce a resource guide on the general framework and process for replication that identifies ways to adapt the process for application in diverse situations



FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL

A major focus—and challenge—is to develop a process that can be adapted to basins around the world. Beginning with our pilot, we will identify ways to tailor the process so we can develop credible report cards in data- or resource-limited situations, national or transboundary basins, and regions where there is not ample funding for conservation measures.

Through partnerships with innovative replication experts, we will ultimately generate a standardized method that WWF and other organizations can use to measurably improve the health and sustainability of freshwater basins worldwide.

All life needs water. It is the world's most precious resource, fueling everything from the food we eat, to the cotton we wear, to the energy we depend upon every day. But climate change, population growth, changing consumption patterns and a host of other challenges are putting freshwater systems increasingly at risk.

Protecting fresh water cannot happen alone, and it cannot happen in a vacuum. WWF partners with governments, businesses, international financial institutions and communities to strengthen and protect freshwater systems. Basin report cards will help revolutionize how these diverse stakeholders collaborate, facilitating a water-secure future for people and nature.

If you are interested in learning more about our work on basin report cards, please contact the WWF staff below.

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