

AROUND THE GLOBE

Canadians Wary of Interest in Their Water

A Nov. 24 article titled “America is Thirsty” by Steve Maich in *Maclean's*, a weekly Canadian news magazine, describes America’s growing need for water and Canada’s response to the idea of sharing—that is, selling—its own. With more than 20 percent of the world’s fresh water, Canada is the most water-rich nation on Earth, according to Maich, yet it supports just half a percent of the world’s population. Nevertheless, Maich found that most Canadians are opposed to exporting their water, even to help “our biggest trading partner and most essential ally.” Informal suggestions by the United States to create international trade in water with Canada have been swiftly rebuffed.

It’s not only America that is thirsty. According to Maich, the United Nations has stated that the only way to alleviate chronic water shortages expected to affect two-

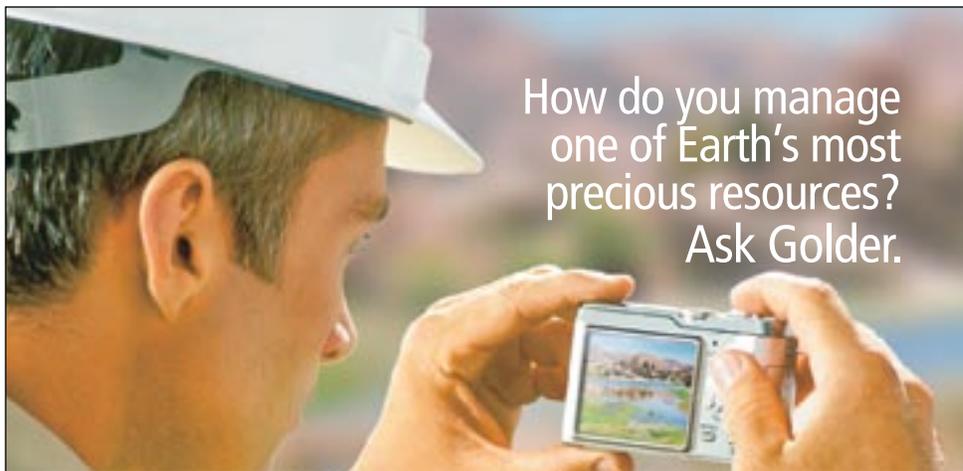
thirds of the world population by 2025 will be through water markets and trade, and by discouraging water waste. As shortages increase, the world is likely to focus attention on Canada’s water consumption rates, which are among the highest in the world and increasing, says Maich. Water is cheap and plentiful, conservation is not a concern, and waste is high. If the country continues to consume so freely and refrain from sharing, in Maich’s words, “Canada will look like the neighbour who leaves his sprinkler on all night while the rest of the street dies of thirst.”

Maich cited a number of arguments he heard for Canada keeping its water within its borders: water is a human right and not a commodity to be sold to the highest bidder; other countries’ water issues are not Canada’s problem to solve; people should not live where there is not enough water to support them; many Canadians do not think Canada has any extra water to spare; and some fear that if Canada agreed to sell any

of its water to the United States, the United States could, under NAFTA, demand unlimited access to it.

But others whom Maich spoke with pointed out that Canada uses water to irrigate crops, make steel, and refine oil, all of which are exported, along with bottled water itself, to the rest of the world. What’s the difference? Further, the NAFTA concern has been debunked by several legal opinions.

Maich believes Canada has much to gain by releasing some of its water, and possibly a lot to lose if it does not. Humanitarian and foreign relations issues aside, the economic opportunities for the country are huge. Maich cited a 2001 study by the Frontier Centre for Public Policy in Winnipeg that showed Manitoba could make about \$4 billion per year by selling 1.3 trillion gallons of water annually, roughly the amount that drains into Hudson Bay in only 17 hours, at the price charged for desalinated water in California.



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In Maich's opinion, "They're [the United States] already looking for ways to take our water. We should tone down the emotion and figure out how to sell it to them."

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Atlas Documents Changes in African Lakes

from the United Nations Environmental Programme

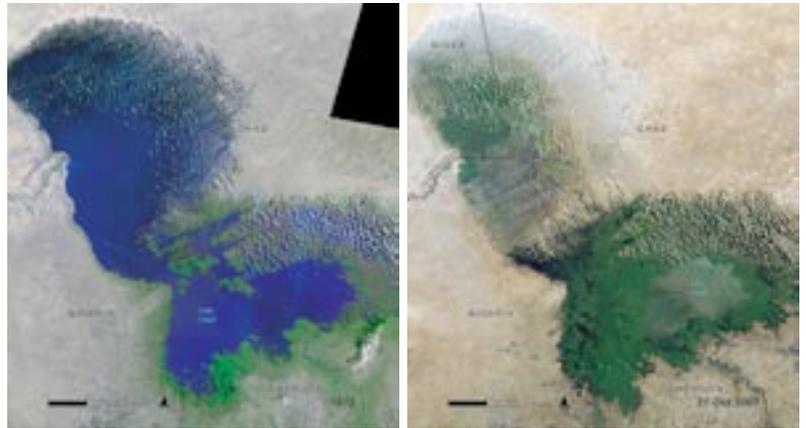
The United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) is producing a new atlas that documents dramatic changes that have occurred in African lakes over the past few decades. The *Atlas of African Lakes* compares and contrasts satellite images from as far back as the 1970s with recent images, illustrating the damaging environmental changes that are taking place.

Among the images shown are the rapid shrinking of Lake Songor in Ghana, partly as a result of intensive salt production;

extraordinary changes in the Zambezi River system as a result of the building of the Cabora Basa Dam; and the near 90 percent shrinkage of Lake Chad.

The atlas was unveiled at the opening of the 11th World Lake Conference in Nairobi, Kenya, last fall. UNEP Executive Director Klaus Toepfer said he hoped the striking lake images would unite the delegates at the meeting in efforts to conserve and restore the lakes.

The atlas is expected to be published in book form in 2006. Meanwhile, images of many of the lakes may be viewed or downloaded from na.unep.net/AfricaLakes/.



Lake Chad in 2001 (right) covers just a fraction of its 1972 extent (left).

New Ocean Forming in Ethiopia?

Researchers think a 37-mile long fissure in northeastern Ethiopia may be the beginning of a new ocean, the *Associated Press* reported. The fissure, located in the Afar Desert, first formed in September 2005 following an earthquake, and had grown to 13 feet wide by the time researchers presented their findings at the annual American Geophysical Union meeting in San Francisco in December.

A team of 18 Ethiopian, American, British, French, and Italian scientists are studying the fissure; they estimate it will take about a million years to fully form an ocean. In the process, the eastern portion of Ethiopia will likely tear off from the rest of Africa, with the ocean forming in the gap, said the *AP* report.

Research team leader Dereje Ayalew of Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia told *AP* that "the crust under Afar is becoming like the crust found in the Red Sea... Once the crust is formed you will have water because it is a low area and the water will migrate from the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. It becomes a basin."

Researchers with the Ethiopian Afar Geophysical Lithospheric Experiment, have set up monitoring instruments to observe the progress of the split. At current rates, the Afar desert is moving off the continent of Africa at a rate of about 0.8 inches per year, said the *AP*.

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