

# Water-related High Conservation Values

March 2018

## Introduction

The Important Water Related Areas (IWRA) concept was introduced in Version 1-0 of the AWS Standard, in order to address more directly, water related values within the High Conservation Values (HCV) framework.

The HCV concept was first introduced within the Forest Stewardship Council's Standard in 1999. In the nearly 20 years since, FSC maintains the definition of HCV, but a multitude of other standards systems and other initiatives have adopted the idea. In the FSC system, the definition is supported by Principle 9 and its associated Criteria and Indicators. These take the form of the 'Plan, Do, Check, Act' cycle, which is also at the core of the AWS Steps. In the FSC system, the special status given to HCV's is supported by the requirement to take a precautionary approach to the identification and management of such values. This means that you suspect you have these values, but do not have empirical evidence, then you treat them as if they were HVCs.

The High Conservation Value Resource Network has been set up to support the implementation of the HCV concept across standard and other initiatives. More information can be found on their website: <https://www.hcvnetwork.org>

## Issues with IWRA

- IWRA definition references HCV, but does not fully address the concept
- HVC is widely used and understood. Alignment would facilitate greater use of water-related HCVs in other systems using the HCV concept.
- References to "natural infrastructure" is a confusing term and somewhat redundant.

## Suggested Definition with examples included

The following definition is taken directly from that found on the HCV Resource Network website, other than the items highlighted in blue.

**Water-related High Conservation Values (WHCVs)** are biological, ecological, social, or cultural **water-related** values which are outstandingly significant or critically important at the national, regional, or global level. There are different categories of Water Related HCVs.

There are six categories of WHCVs:

### **W**HCV 1 Species Diversity

Concentrations of **water-related** biological diversity including endemic species, and rare, threatened or endangered species, that are significant at national, regional, or global levels.

#### Examples:

- Rare, threatened or endangered species freshwater species
- Endemic freshwater species

#### WHCV 2 Catchment-level wetland ecosystems and mosaics

Catchment-level **water-related** ecosystems and mosaics that contain viable populations of the great majority of the naturally occurring species in natural patterns of distribution and abundance.

#### Examples:

- Intact or mosaic hydropatterns (e.g., rivers with natural flow regimes, lakes and wetlands with natural hydroperiods)
- Freshwaters with unfragmented longitudinal connectivity (e.g. rivers without upstream/downstream barriers preventing species from completing life cycles)
- Freshwaters with unfragmented lateral connectivity (e.g. unmodified river channels with dynamic connection to floodplain)
- Freshwaters with natural water quality conditions (e.g. unmodified thermal, sediment, and nutrient regimes)
- Relatively intact watersheds/catchments (e.g., land cover conversion below threshold of concern)
- Freshwaters with intact native communities (e.g., lakes without invasive species)

#### WHCV 3 Water-related ecosystems and habitats

Rare, threatened, or endangered **water-related** ecosystems, habitats, or refugia.

#### Examples:

- Rare freshwater ecosystems/habitat types
- Threatened or endangered freshwater ecosystems/habitat types
- Areas of critical temporal use, including flow or thermal refugia, spawning/breeding, nursery, migratory, feeding, or overwintering areas (e.g., floodplains, deep or vernal pools, river channel corridors)
- Flood plane forests

#### WHCV 4 Critical **water-related** ecosystem services

Basic **water-related** ecosystem services in critical situations.

#### Examples:

- Watershed/catchment areas critical to managing/maintaining extreme flow events (e.g., flooding, drought)
- Vegetated buffer strips or intact floodplains
- Groundwater recharge zones
- Watershed/catchment areas critical to maintaining downstream flow regimes (e.g. high surface water yield areas necessary for maintaining overland flow and interflow; timing/volume)
- Watershed/catchment areas critical to maintaining water quality characteristics (maintenance/purification = temperature/sedimentation/pH/oxygen/light/nutrients/toxins)



#### WHCV 5 Community water-related needs

**Water-related** sites and resources fundamental for satisfying the basic necessities of local communities or indigenous peoples (for livelihoods, health, nutrition, etc.) identified through engagement with local communities or indigenous peoples.

#### Examples:

- Water sources necessary for access to drinking water
- Water sources necessary for access to sanitation
- Freshwater animal or plant populations relied upon by local communities for income or sustenance
- Waterways and water bodies necessary for access/navigation
- Water sources relied upon by local communities for food security
- Waterways and water bodies serving as local energy sources
- Wetland areas that are critical to communities for climate change adaptation.

#### WHCV 6 Water-related cultural values

**Water-related** sites, resources, habitats, and landscapes of national, or global cultural, archaeological, or historical significance, and/or of critical cultural, ecological, economic, or religious/sacred importance for the traditional cultures of local communities or indigenous peoples, identified through engagement with these local communities or indigenous peoples.

#### Examples:

- Waterways and water bodies with high religious, cultural, or historical significance
- Culturally significant products collected from freshwater systems
- Waterways and water bodies of high recreational value