



The Eden Again Project Mesopotamian Marshland Restoration

Welcome to the first edition of the Eden Again newsletter. You are receiving this email because you have at some point in the past expressed interest in the project, and we promised to keep you updated. We apologize if it took a while to fulfill that promise. If at any time you would like to stop receiving this newsletter, please just reply with the title “unsubscribe newsletter” and we will comply. If you know anyone who would like to receive this newsletter, please reply with an email address; the newsletter does not forward very well. This edition of the newsletter provides some basic background on the project and our progress towards fulfillment of our goals.

Who We Are

In August 2001, the United Nations Environmental Program prepared a report entitled “The Mesopotamian Marshlands: Demise of an Ecosystem” by Mr. Hassan Partow, documenting the devastation of this globally significant ecosystem. In response, the Eden Again Project was founded by a group of Iraqi expatriates appalled by the destruction of their homeland’s environment and cultural heritage. In response to news accounts decrying “the end of Eden,” they optimistically named the project “Eden Again.”

The Eden Again Project is sponsored by the Iraq Foundation (www.iraqfoundation.org), a non-profit corporation working since 1991 for a better international understanding of Iraq’s potential as a contributor to political stability and economic progress in the Middle East. The Foundation is non-partisan, non-sectarian and non-ethnic, and is not affiliated with any other organization, political party, or government. Ms. Rend Rahim Francke is the Executive Director of the Iraq Foundation and of the Eden Again Project.



The original project staff included Drs. Azzam and Suzie Alwash (pictured left, from The Washington Post). Azzam was born in Kut, Iraq, and as a child traveled in the marshlands with his father, the district irrigation engineer. He emigrated to the U.S. in 1978, and was working as a civil engineer in California when he learned of the marshland destruction. With his wife, a professional geologist, and the help of the Iraq Foundation, they embarked upon a private study of the feasibility of restoring the marshes. They generated enough data to convince the U.S. Department of State to grant the Iraq Foundation

\$220,000 to further evaluate scenarios for marshland restoration.

The grant allowed them to hire a full-time Project Manager, Dr. Michelle Stevens (pictured right, from The Sacramento Bee). Dr. Stevens is a restoration



ecologist and ethnobotanist with a specialty in restoration ecology. Prior to the Eden Again Project, she was working for the California Department of Water Resources developing restoration plans for the San Joaquin and Sacramento Rivers and teaching at Sacramento State College.

What We Do

The mission of the Eden Again Project is to promote the restoration of the Mesopotamian Marshlands. Our goals are to:

- Assemble a group of international experts ready to assist with the technical aspects of marshland restoration.
- Develop planning documents to assist with marshland restoration.
- Conduct an effective outreach program to educate the global public about the value of the marshlands.
- Work with international organizations and regional governments to achieve a sustainable restoration.
- Work with local grassroots organizations to foster local decision-making and stewardship of the marshlands.
- Develop partnerships with local scientific communities for reciprocal capacity building.

The following sections describe the progress on our goals over the last year.

Goal One: Assemble a Group of International Experts

In June 2002, the Project Team began to assemble an international panel of scientists to provide advice on the technical aspects of marshland restoration and inform the development of technical planning documents that could lay the foundation for such restoration (the International Technical Advisory Panel, or ITAP). The ITAP is an inter-disciplinary and international group of scientists with expertise in hydrology, engineering, ecology, soil sciences, geology, and biological sciences. They include (in alphabetical order):

Mr. Issam Ali, Psomas Engineering
Dr. Saud Amer, EROS Data Center
Dr. Abdolhamid Amirebrahimi, Iran
Dr. Rich Beilfuss, International Crane Foundation
Dr. Jim Bishop, Kuwait Institute of Scientific Research
Dr. John Callaway, University of San Francisco
Dr. Brian Coad, Canadian Museum of Nature
Dr. Tom Crisman, University of Florida
Dr. Thomas Dunne, University of California-Santa Barbara
Mr. Mike Evans, United Kingdom
Mr. Doug Hamilton, Senior Managing Engineer, Exponent, Inc
Dr. Hassan Janabi, Australia
Dr. Mary Kentula, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Dr. Edward Maltby, Royal Holloway University of London
Mr. Hassan Partow, University of Geneva, Switzerland
Dr. Curtis Richardson, Duke University
Dr. Derek Scott, United Kingdom
Dr. George Zalidis, Aristotle University
Dr. Joy Zedler, University of Wisconsin-Madison

The first meeting of the ITAP, a Restoration Planning Workshop, was held on February 16th and 17th, 2003. The workshop was held at the National Academy of Sciences' Beckman Center on the campus of the University of California in Irvine, California. Concur, Inc. of Berkeley, California facilitated the workshop. Workshop participants also included Mr. Milton Rider of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Ms. Tanya Stasiuk of the U.S. Department of State, and Amar Appeal. Mr. Ramadan Albadran and Mr. Kais Mukhly al-Iraqi provided moving accounts of the plight of their fellow Marsh Dwellers.

Goal Two: Develop Planning Documents

The result of the Restoration Planning Workshop was to prepare an action plan for initiating restoration of the Mesopotamian Marshlands. Restoration is used in its broadest sense, which includes both promoting a return to original conditions and projects that improve wetland resources or functions according to local needs and desires. We are taking an ecosystem approach, with a balance of conservation of biological diversity, sustainable use of marshland components and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the use of genetic resources. The ecosystem approach recognizes that people are an integral part of the system. Its application is underpinned by principles that recognize the scientific, socio-cultural and economic complexity of the integrated management of land, water and living resources.

The ITAP came to a consensus that restoration is both technically feasible and worthwhile; that multiple ecological, economic and socio-cultural benefits will occur from restoration of the marshlands on a local, regional and global scale; and that restoration should proceed in a stepwise and incremental fashion, drawing upon available information and analogous sites to plan demonstration marsh restoration projects.

Water supply is a major constraint on the potential to restore the Mesopotamian wetlands. A recent study by Exponent, Inc. (conducted by Mr. Andrea Cattarossi and Mr. Douglas Hamilton) reviewed existing hydrologic conditions in Iraq and prepared a preliminary hydrodynamic analysis of water moving across the marshlands. Upon review of the study, the ITAP agreed on three steps that could be taken to allow more water to flow into the wetlands. First, a large portion of the current flow of the Tigris and Euphrates could be re-introduced to the marshlands by partially modifying existing hydro-engineering structures located along the rivers in southern Iraq. Second, the ITAP agreed that much depends on water management practices. Therefore, the ITAP recommended developing a water budget approach to quantify the inflows to and outflows from the marshlands and to determine water requirements within the marshes and for other beneficial uses in Iraq. Third, the ITAP recommended exploring the possibility of an integrated water management approach in the watershed. Given projected future uses of water in the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers headwaters, fair and equitable distribution of water rights in riparian countries will be key to long-term successful restoration efforts.

Various scenarios were proposed for the marshes. Demonstration projects were identified that could be implemented quickly and early in the planning process following consultation with local communities and the appropriate Iraqi authorities. These projects would provide early tangible results and generate experimental data to facilitate an adaptive management approach to restoration

Goal Three: Develop a Global Outreach Program

Restoration of the Mesopotamian Marshlands has struck a sensitive nerve in generous people around the world. Our project has been covered extensively in U.S. and international news articles, magazines, radio, and television. One result of this outreach has been contact from you. We would like to thank each of you individually for the good thoughts, prayers and support that you have sent – usually they have come just when we needed them.

This newsletter represents a part of our effort to reach out to the global audience; please let us know of anyone else who would like to receive these updates. In addition, we are developing an educational website about the Mesopotamian Marshlands and efforts to restore them. If you know of any information that we should include in this website (especially marshland photographs) please let us know.

Goal Four: Work with International Organizations and Regional Governments

Restoration of the Mesopotamian Marshlands will need to involve a multilateral and international approach. We are in the process of developing partnerships with national governments, international aid organizations and conservation groups to ensure that adequate resources are available to achieve restoration goals.

In November 2002, the Eden Again team attended the Global Biodiversity Forum prior to the Ramsar COP8 Convention in Valencia, Spain. It was a significant step forward to have the Ramsar Conference of Parties consider the plight of the Mesopotamian marshes and the impacts marsh desiccation has had on both the culture and ecology of the region.

In May 2003, Eden Again staff attended an international forum convened by the United Nations Environmental Program to discuss restoration of the Mesopotamian Marshes, where we discussed our plans with the International Conservation Union, the Ramsar Bureau, Wetlands International, Birdlife International, World Wildlife Fund, World Health Organization, the Amar Appeal, and the Food and Agricultural Organization.

We have also been in touch with UNESCO and the Convention on Biological Diversity, and Dr. Ed Maltby has been developing contacts and coordinating with Kuwaiti and Iranian resource managers and scientists. We plan to coordinate with international partners to take a local and regional perspective on bioremediation, restoration of the marshes for the people and the ecology, and supporting the Iraqi socioeconomic rehabilitation to the best of our abilities.

Goal Five: Work with Local Grassroots Organizations

The future of the Mesopotamian marshlands will ultimately be defined by the concerns and needs of the people of Iraq. In order to properly represent that perspective, an outreach process is being planned to listen to local people and determine what they want and need. Outreach is particularly sensitive in a war torn country, where people have been ravaged by decades of war, sanctions and oppression, and there is no governance or infrastructure to coordinate appropriate restoration or resource management. It will take time and care to build trust. Having the Iraq Foundation in Iraq, in a service capacity and hiring Iraqi citizens, will help us build trust and tune in to local needs and concerns.

Appropriate stakeholders may include marsh dwellers and other local inhabitants, government ministries, local scientists and resource specialists, local community organizations and grassroots environmental groups, international conservation groups, and local land use planners. An appropriate method for obtaining input from these stakeholders should be developed with respect for local intellectual property rights and cultural traditions, along with respect for personal privacy. Information derived from this public outreach process should then be used to base restoration planning, implementation, monitoring, and adaptive management. Eden Again is working with international conservation groups to develop a stakeholder outreach plan and will work with international groups in its implementation.

Goal Six: Reciprocal Capacity-Building

There is a tremendous store of knowledge within Iraq. We are currently contacting scientists at the University of Basrah, the University of Baghdad, and within the Ministries of Irrigation and Agriculture and other scientific research institutes in Iraq and plan to be a bridge between Iraqi universities and scientists and the academic world in the west. We anticipate learning much more about the marshland environment from these scientific communities and from the marsh dwellers themselves. Yet the Iraqi scientists have been cut off from the international community for decades, and the universities lack the basic essentials needed for scientific research. The ITAP, along with other educational institutions worldwide, have offered to assist the Iraqi universities. There are numerous plans to develop technical exchange programs. Additional opportunities exist with the USAID project for rebuilding higher education.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

We are very grateful for the incredible outpouring of support and offers of help from people all over the world. Many people's hearts go out to the Iraq people, who have suffered for decades. Restoration of the marshlands is an important step towards peace for the land and the people. To people living near the marshes, the ecosystem is a living thing and an integral part of their lives. The marshes are a cultural icon, and their significance to the Iraqi people cannot be overestimated.

Tired of waiting, local Iraqis have already begun breaching the dams to let the waters back into the marshes. Technical guidance and assistance offered by the Iraq Foundation and the ITAP can help with bioremediation to prevent dispersal of toxics in the marshes, and can help increase restoration success. At this time, we could use your support for this important work. If you would like to help financially, checks may be sent to the Iraq Foundation (earmarked for Eden Again) at: 1012 14th Street NW, Suite 1110, Washington DC 20005. You will receive a thank you letter indicating our tax-deductible status.

Many of you have expressed interest in employment opportunities. We do not have any job openings at this time, but we promise to advertise any openings that we do have in this newsletter; please hold your resumes until you see an appropriate opening.

We have also received many offers from people who want to personally help on a volunteer basis. We have one project at this time that could use your help: rebuilding the library of Basrah University, which was completely destroyed during the recent conflict. Our interest at this time is engineering and the life and physical sciences. If you have any relationships with publisher's representatives or bookstores, please ask if they could donate copies. We would prefer new books, but old standards in good condition would also be welcome. We are hoping that commercial air traffic will re-open in Iraq soon; once that does, we will let you know where the donated materials can be sent prior to shipment to Iraq. We do not have any funding for this project; if you can send a donation earmarked for "Eden Again, Basrah University Library," we will use those funds for storage, transport, and shipping. Thank you and keep the marshlands in your thoughts.