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## **NATION URGED TO TAKE ACTION TO HEAD OFF LOOMING FRESHWATER CRISIS**

Economy, public health, ecosystems threatened without new direction in freshwater management by public and private sectors, panel cautions

WASHINGTON, D.C., Sep. 15, 2010 – Citing a looming freshwater crisis that could affect the nation's economy, the livability of our communities and the health of our ecosystems, the Institute for Public Health and Water Research (IPWR) joined a diverse coalition of businesses, farmers, environmental not-for-profits and government agencies today to issue a landmark call to action aimed at heading off a national crisis in water quality and supply.

*"Charting New Waters: A Call to Action to Address U.S. Freshwater Challenges,"* is the culmination of an intensive two-year collaboration exploring solutions to U.S. freshwater challenges. It was presented to the Obama Administration at a meeting of federal agencies convened by the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), and released to the public during a noon forum at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center.

Present at the meeting were IPWR Executive Director Jennie Ward Robinson, Ph.D., and Health and Scientific Advisory Board member Timothy Ford, Ph.D., Vice President for Research and Dean of Graduate Studies at the University of New England.

"There was broad consensus among participants that our current path will, unless changed, lead us to a national freshwater crisis in the foreseeable future," the *Call to Action* reports. "This reality encompasses a wide array of challenges ... that collectively amount to a tenuous trajectory for the future of the nation's freshwater resources."

The report identifies serious challenges to the quality and supply of freshwater, such as pollution and scarcity; competing urban, rural and ecosystem water needs; climate change; environmental and public health impacts; and a variety of economic implications. The document offers actions to confront these threats and a plan to ensure that our freshwater resources are secure for the 21st century.

While a great deal of progress has been made since landmark freshwater legislation in the 1970s, many freshwater challenges persist, the report says. It sees some as acute and obvious, such as severe droughts and broken water mains. Others are characterized as more subtle and chronic, building quietly over the years – such as endocrine disrupting chemicals in rivers and drinking water and the slow but steady depletion of aquifers and declining snowpack in parts of the country.

The document is believed to be the first such comprehensive, cross-sector examination of U.S. freshwater challenges and solutions. It represents consensus recommendations of diverse interests convened by The Johnson Foundation at Wingspread in Racine, Wisconsin.

"IPWR fully supports this call to action," said Dr. Ward Robinson. "The future of fresh water, its scarcity, and its impact on human health presents a national and international crisis. The nation must begin to take measures now to secure our drinking water supply and ensure public health safety." IPWR advisory board members Nicholas Ashbolt, Ph.D. of the EPA's National Exposure Research Laboratory and Gary Winston, Ph.D., Director of the National Center for Water Quality Research were also contributing members of the coalition.

Reliable freshwater supplies are an essential underpinning of U.S. economic security, with energy generation, manufacturing, food production and many activities of daily life dependent on access to freshwater, the report says. It notes that an estimated 41 percent of U.S. freshwater withdrawals are for

thermoelectric power generation, primarily coal, nuclear and natural gas; 37 percent go toward irrigated agriculture.

"For too long, our society has treated water as a cheap, non-strategic and infinitely available resource. Not anymore. Threats to water quality and access are putting our businesses, communities and way of life in jeopardy. The time to act is now," said S. Curtis Johnson, chairman of Diversey Inc., a leading global provider of cleaning and hygiene solutions to the institutional marketplace and co-signer of the *Call to Action*.

The document proposes a series of shared actions across sectors to ensure sustainable and resilient freshwater resources so that we have the ability to absorb changes, sudden or otherwise, through flexible water management strategies.

The *Call to Action's* recommendations include a range of freshwater management strategies to head off a potential crisis, such as streamlining and better coordinating fragmented governance among federal, state and local jurisdictions. Another key need identified in the report is modernizing our freshwater regulatory framework, developed in the 1970s to deal with the acute environmental issues of that era.

"For decades, U.S. water strategy has been cobbled together from diverse, incomplete, and sometimes conflicting policies. We can no longer afford to manage our water that way. The good news is that smart, effective, and innovative solutions to the nation's water problems exist and can be implemented. That's what this report recommends," said Dr. Peter Gleick, President of the Pacific Institute, one of the nation's leading water scientists and a co-signer of the *Call to Action*.

The report also calls for better accounting of the full cost of services delivered by municipal water and wastewater utilities and sharing this information with consumers. Revised pricing structures that more accurately reflect the full cost of services could be one step toward financing badly needed upgrades to U.S. water and wastewater systems.

"Freshwater is our most precious resource and the lifeblood of our economy – industry, agriculture and energy generation all depend heavily on adequate supplies of freshwater. Water quality in our natural and municipal freshwater systems is vital to the health and livability of our communities," said Helen Johnson-Leipold, chairman of The Johnson Foundation at Wingspread. "The Foundation and its many partners in this collaboration offer the *Call to Action* as a means of bringing overdue attention to our nation's freshwater challenges and sparking action to address them."

A leading representative of the agriculture community commended the process that led to today's announcement. "It's enabled a range of participants who seldom engage each other to arrive at some potentially significant and effective recommendations, such as those regarding water quality and the Farm Bill, guidelines for the work and composition of the proposed Freshwater Commission, and emphasis on the importance of local and state leadership in developing co-beneficial solutions based on sound data in local watersheds," said Ray Gaesser, past president of the Iowa Soybean Association and co-signer of the *Call to Action*.

In addition to signing onto the *Call to Action*, the parties in this groundbreaking initiative also made commitments as individual organizations to take actions to address freshwater challenges. For additional information about these commitments and the *Call to Action*, please visit [www.johnsonfdn.org](http://www.johnsonfdn.org).

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